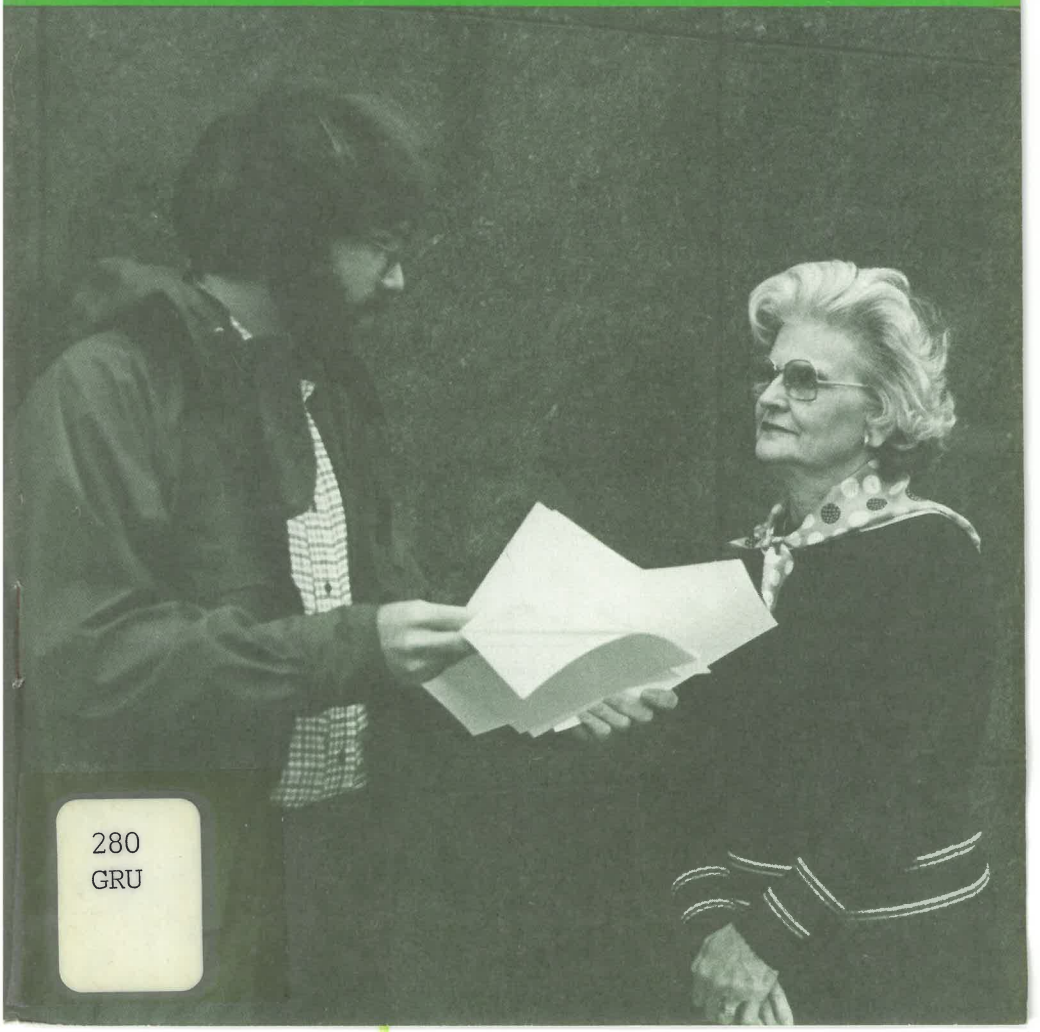
CHRISTIAN DOCTRINE

Member's Booklet/Individual Study Guide

The Christian Confronting the Cults I

REVISED



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CHAPTER 1

Encountering Cults

Glenn A. Igleheart

America is made for the breeding and growth of cults. Many cults have been imported from abroad. Several are native born. But all flourish in a land where individualism is strong, where "the right to worship according to the dictates of one's conscience" is hard won and much practiced.

For many people, wanting to know about the cults is a matter of curiosity. But for most, the desire to know arises from contact. A Mormon family moves next door. A Jehovah's Witness works where you do. Your aunt orders *The Plain Truth* magazine and sends you copies, too. A Moonie asks for money at the shopping center. Your widowed father remarries, this time to a Christian Scientist.

Some of these contacts are religious in nature. A Jehovah's Witness comes to your door visiting for her faith. Or, in the visitation program of your own church, you encounter a Mormon and do not know what to say.

Sometimes the contact is less direct. You are visiting for evangelistic purposes in a home, and you suddenly realize from something the woman says that she is comparing your views with those of a Mormon who visited her. You become newly aware of the need to know the difference between what you believe and what others believe.

What can you hope to gain from this study? First, you will understand your own faith better. Second, you will be better equipped to listen to others. Third, you will be better able to tell others of your own faith. Finally, you will have some standards by which to measure all belief systems, including your own.

The call for discernment comes from 1 John 4:1: "Test the spirits, to see whether they are from God, for among those who have gone out into

the world there are many prophets falsely inspired."[1] This concern of the early church carried over from their Jewish heritage. Israel lived in the midst of pagan peoples. They sought always to discover the will of God for them, proper worship (no human sacrifices or hilltop prostitution rites), and proper behavior for the people chosen of Yahweh. The basic commandments were clear, and the condemnation of those who varied from these norms was often severe (for example, death by stoning for those who claimed to be one with God).

The Bible is concerned with drawing boundary lines around what it means to be a Christian. A Christian cult is a group that has gone "out of bounds." A group becomes a sect or a cult when it takes one or more Christian doctrines and overemphasizes them to the point that the result deviates from orthodox Christian beliefs. A cult, then, is a group that claims to be Christian but denies essential Christian doctrines. Or cults may combine Christian beliefs with those from other world religions so that the combination is beyond accepted Christian belief or behavior.

In early Christian history several Christian gatherings called councils were called to deal with issues, usually doctrinal in nature: What is the Christian consensus about the nature of Christ—human, divine, both? What should Christians believe about the Trinity? When these Christians came to places like Nicea and Chalcedon, feeling they were led by the Spirit to decide on these doctrinal boundary lines, persons outside were called heretics, and their beliefs were no longer accepted as Christian.

Historians recognize that many of these ancient heresies are reappearing in modern sectarian and cult groups. Deviations are not a new phenomenon for Christians. They have always been with us. We are called upon to discern between the biblical and the nonbiblical, the true and the not-so-true, even the false.

If all "Christian" groups said the same thing, there would be little cause for checking on the standard. Most of these groups, for example, affirm that God exists. But of what nature? A man who progressed from being a man, degree by degree, until He achieved divinity (Mormon)? Not a personal lover but impersonal, abstract Love (Christian Science, Unity)? Or a God who is eternal, changeless, but self-revealing (New Testament)?

The Case for Encounter

All Christians are called to bear witness to their faith. Our efforts to reach out in the name of Christ are to be as all-encompassing as His love. If we believe that His eternal life is offered to all, then our witness must be to all.

Baptists often say, "The Bible is our norm of faith and practice." If this is true, then we become interpreters of what we understand that norm, or standard, to be. Some depictions of God we would affirm as biblical; others we regard as outside the boundaries of authentic Bible teaching.

Our concern is not only that all persons accept some concept of Christ, but also that these persons accept the Christ of the Scriptures. To give one's life to a distorted view of God or Christ is to miss the mark. The need to share our witness with those who represent what we consider a

Christian deviation is imperative.

Cult groups also have standards that they apply to us. Some of these groups believe that Baptists are not Christians; they deny the authenticity of our churches, pastors, and denominational structure. These challenge our faith, our orders of ministry, our church organization, the very message we preach. Therefore, some reply is in order.

The Characteristics of Cults

As you study these cults, you will note certain characteristics that appear in every group. As you meet persons of these faiths, you will note common marks.

Cults are deviations. This aspect cannot be stated too strongly. One of the marks of all cults is that they depart from authentic, biblical, orthodox Christian beliefs.

Cults are corrective attempts. Cult founders often react to a belief or a practice common to the churches of their day that they seek to correct. Mary Baker Eddy pictured God as Love in contrast to the severe Judge-God proclaimed by most Calvinist, New England preachers of her day.

No offering is taken in Jehovah's Witness services, in contrast to the many offerings Charles T. Russell saw being taken in churches of his day. Similar reactions are evident in the Armstrongs' practice of sending *The Plain Truth* magazine without a subscription price.

Cult converts come from religious backgrounds. Most converts to cult groups have some religious background. Their journey to this new faith is from a former faith, rather than from no faith at all. Most cult groups pitch their appeals to persons who have some prior religious knowledge.

Cult converts were failed by the church or synagogue. When you ask a convert about his spiritual pilgrimage before he became a member of the Unification Church, he often tells you that he was disappointed or disillusioned by something that happened in his church, such as a church quarrel, or by something that did not happen, like not being visited when ill. At that low point along came a Moonie, a Jehovah's Witness visitor, or a Mormon missionary, who perceived the need and met it.

Many cults are elite groups. Many cults think that they are the one true church. They believe that they possess what other groups do not have. Some (Mormons) think that they have restored the Christian church to its New Testament purity; others (Moonies), that they have discovered biblical secrets not known by others.

This form of special knowledge, like an earlier Gnosticism, gives to its members a sense of special status. To be a member of the in-group sets them apart.

Personal Learning Activity 1

What does the word *cult* mean to you?

What are some of the characteristics of cults?

The Appeal of Cults

What attracts people to cults? Many Baptists are puzzled when members of their church "go off and join that bunch." The appeals of these groups are more varied than their characteristics, but interviews with members of these groups and observations reveal the following attractions.

Cults provide a sense of community. Most cults provide a tight-knit sense of fellowship. Their members know and support one another. When Kingdom Halls get more than from 150 to 200 members, they divide, maintaining small groups.

Cults provide a sense of status. Because they are "the one true church," members of the Kingdom Hall are not too concerned that they are not leaders in their communities. Their status comes from being a publisher for Jehovah. To be identified with the Latter-day Saints means to be a candidate for godhood.

Cults provide opportunities for leadership not open in other churches, especially for women. Most Unity ministers are women. One of the two readers in every Sunday service in the Christian Science Church is a woman.

Some cults provide a more liberal climate. Unitarian Universalists attract persons with an interest in social action and an aversion to doctrinal statements. Those who feel restricted by doctrinal boundaries may seek the freedom-loving groups like Ethical Culture.

Cults offer set answers to hard questions. When will the world end, and what will happen afterward? While many wonder, the Jehovah's Witness confidently sets dates for Armageddon and describes in detail the events of the future. The Armstrongs also have a vision of the future with no question marks.

Others may trust in God and say, "I don't know about the details." No such ambiguity exists among the cultists. Their founder or their book gives the answer, and they do not question it. Cults are not known for their brainstorming sessions or times for mutually seeking the will of God. It is normally proclaimed by the leaders, and the followers do not have to worry about it.

Some have demanding disciplines. The Jehovah's Witness does not celebrate Christmas, Easter, or birthdays. He visits door-to-door on a

quota. The Moonie salesman sets a personal quota for raising funds for the church and feels driven to reach it daily. The Mormon is prohibited from drinking alcohol, coffee, and tea. The Armstrong follower gives 20 percent of her income as a matter of course, 30 percent in some years.

This demand for total commitment draws followers who want to be members of "a group that stands for something." Their zeal stands in sharp contrast to that of many Baptist churches.

Some cults have a world vision. A primary focus of Southern Baptists is on the local church membership. But the vision of the Unification Church is on the total world and Sun Myung Moon's plan for uniting all the world into one faith under one leader. The idealist is attracted to such a goal.

Some cults combine East and West. Christian Science, Unity, and Scientology blend elements from Hinduism and Buddhism with Christianity. Many people desire such an approach, especially when it downplays the uniqueness of the Christian message and seems to be more comprehensive.

Cults minister in crises. The persistent visiting of Mormon and Jehovah's Witness representatives in American homes reveals many persons with unmet needs. When such a person is found, often he is cared for by the visitor in a series of visits, and the person is drawn by this ministry into that faith. A former Jehovah's Witness said that her task was cutting out newspaper obituaries for future visits because she knew that these lonely people would appreciate a visit several weeks after the funeral.

Cults reach minority groups. Many Protestant churches attract the middle class and thereby miss persons at the upper and lower levels of society. The Unity School of Christianity appeals to the wealthy because it has stressed prosperity. Jehovah's Witnesses have drawn many persons from the lower economic classes by their aversion to worldly success standards and higher education.

Some cults stress human potential. The desire for health, wealth, and the realization of human potentialities leads many followers to flock to Scientology lectures, Unity School centers, and Christian Science reading rooms. The cults that do not accept the sinfulness of man, but rather his potentialities, draw persons who are searching for ways to develop themselves, who are looking for fuller, healthier lives.

Cults involve their members. Mormon churches and Jehovah's Witness organizations have many slots for people. There is a place for everyone who wants a part and an activity for almost every day. Life in this group is all-consuming but offers many rewards for that involvement. Similar opportunities for involvement in social action are open in the typical Unitarian Church or Ethical Culture Society newsletter.

Types of Cults

Grouping cults by families is not always easy. To trace the historical lineage is one way. More than one hundred groups have come from the efforts of Joseph Smith, Jr., to restore the one true church.

Sometimes a group is not a deviation from the Christian faith at all but a totally different world religion. For example, Hare Krishna followers are Hindus and are a recognized branch within Hinduism. They are to be assessed not as Christians, but from a Hindu point of view.

Similarly, Scientology does not claim to be aligned with any one world religion, including Christianity. Its insights, its adherents claim, bring benefits to persons of any religious background. Yet it expresses indebtedness to Buddhism in its beliefs about the nature of man and its procedure for bringing man to his highest potential. The better one understands Buddhism, the more comprehensible is Scientology.

It is helpful to group Christian cult groups into three categories:

The mind cults. These cults emphasize the importance of the mind in religion. Some apply reason to religious questions. Others stress the superiority of the mental over the material. Groups that emphasize mental processes affecting health and achievement are Christian Science, the Unity School of Christianity, and Religious Science. Unitarian Universalists are more socially minded and accent the improvement of human society by individual and corporate action.

The millennial cults. These groups began with an intense interest in the end of the world and the second coming of Jesus Christ. They differ in their explanations of what will come and when it will happen, but all have a scheme of eschatology or Last Things. Examples are Seventh-day Adventists, Jehovah's Witnesses, the Worldwide Church of God, and the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

East-West mixes, or imports. The Unification Church began in Korea. Although its founder, Sun Myung Moon, has moved to America with his family and many of his activities, Korea is still central to his theology and vision of the future. The faith of the group is a combination of Eastern and Western terms and thought patterns.

Personal Learning Activity 2

Pick out one of the types of cults about which you know most. (You may have had personal experiences with this type of cult.) What is the appeal of this type of cult?

Changes Cults Make in Christianity

Cults develop as their founders make changes in orthodox Christian teachings that cause the group's doctrines to deviate significantly from

common beliefs. The Christian seeking to understand and witness to persons in cult groups must know where to look for modifications of biblical teachings.

Changes in authority. The primal authority for the Christian is God, the God who has revealed Himself in the Living Word, Jesus; in the written Word, the Bible; and in the inner Word, the Holy Spirit. These provide the Christian with the basis for his belief and his guide for behavior.

Cult groups modify this concept. They often transfer the primal authority figure from God to their founder and her or his descendants. The person in the Mormon Church who speaks for God today is the president of the church, called their "prophet, seer, and revelator." A revelation could come from him that would supersede teachings in the Bible.

Christian Science and Jehovah's Witness church activity is controlled by materials produced in their headquarters. Thus, two leading questions are always: What is your real authority? Who makes the decisions about how you believe and how you live out your beliefs? The answers can help a Christian determine whether a group is a cult and in what ways it differs from Christianity.

Changes in the concept of Christ. Because Christ is central to Christianity, cults modify their approach to Him in some way. Usually this change takes away His uniqueness or divinity.

Jehovah's Witnesses, for example, make Christ the first created Being. Others, like Unitarians, claim that He was the finest of human beings but was not divine. For them He is the Way-shower, the example of how people are to live.

Or if we are seen as having a spark of the divine in us, Jesus is as divine as the rest of us; for we all possess this divinity, said a Religious Science leader in an interview. Jesus is one of a long line of master teachers. The bodily resurrection is denied by Jehovah's Witnesses and the Worldwide Church of God.

Other changes in Christ include His marital state. Many Mormon leaders have taught that Jesus was married and that His was a plural marriage. The Worldwide Church of God believes that the crucifixion was on a Wednesday. Moonies teach that Jesus is spiritual Savior, but physical salvation depends on a coming Lord of the Second Advent.

Changes in the concept of God. A basic tenet of Christianity is that there is only one God but that this God has manifested Himself as Father, Son, and Spirit. Some cults deny the unity of God. Mormons describe a plurality of gods. The Trinity is denied by Jehovah's Witnesses and others. For the Christian Scientist, God becomes an impersonal principle, more abstract Love than the God who loves. The groups that have added Hindu concepts to their Christian system tend toward pantheism, identifying God with the world of nature.

Changes in the concept of the Holy Spirit. Instead of being a person of the Trinity, the Holy Spirit is viewed as an impersonal force by the Worldwide Church of God and Jehovah's Witnesses. Mary Baker Eddy understood Christian Science to be the Holy Spirit.

Changes in the concept of salvation. Several groups make human works an integral part of salvation. The Jehovah's Witness visitor is not knocking on doors because she knows that she is saved but because it is a way of earning salvation. Jehovah's Witnesses, Latter-day Saints, and the Worldwide Church of God believe that Christ's death atoned for past sins only; personal compliance with rituals and obedience to laws or rules of living are necessary for redemption. Moonies' doctrine of indemnity calls for them to help save the world, especially their own ancestors, by a life of sacrifice and service.

These work-to-be-saved emphases conflict with the doctrine of faith as a free gift. Action is a part of the Christian life, but its purpose is to show that one is saved and wants to share that witness, not to earn salvation.

Mind cults perceive salvation as a mental activity. It involves a change in attitude and perception, not the change in relationship with God that the Bible prescribes. Man is to see the reality of the spiritual and deny the reality of the material, either now or in the future. Man is not a sinner; therefore, he must come to perceive this and surrender himself to the divine forces within. This the mind sects call salvation.

Universalists teach that eventually all persons will be saved. Mormons tend to believe this, too. The destiny of the unbeliever is not an eternal hell but annihilation, according to a number of cults (Jehovah's Witnesses, Seventh-day Adventists, the Worldwide Church of God).

Changes in the doctrine of man. It is not always clear what some groups believe about man, but their concepts often vary from the biblical understanding that man is made in the image of God as a creature, but with a potential for relationship with God through faith in Jesus Christ.

To some, man is already divine and needs only to discover that for himself. Christian Science and Unity hold this view. To others, man is now human, but he can become divine if he follows their recommendations. Mormons believe that man can eventually become a god and rule with his wives and children over extraterrestrial worlds. This is the goal of every good Mormon.

Changes in the Bible. All cult groups misuse the Bible. Although many of them claim to ground their belief system in the Bible, none are known as Bible scholars in the wider Christian world, primarily because they impose certain biases on their study of the Scriptures.

Some add other books to the Bible and make these their authority. Mormons regard as authoritative three works in addition to the Bible: *The Book of Mormon, Doctrine and Covenants,* and *The Pearl of Great Price. Divine Principle* is the extra book added by the Unification Church, and Christian Scientists look to *Science and Health with Key to the Scriptures.* The latter title is instructive, because it points to a common theme in some cults: they have discovered the correct way to interpret the Bible, and this interpretation is contained in a certain book.

Cults change the meaning of most biblical terms to match their beliefs. For example, Mary Baker Eddy's glossary in *Science and Health* gives the "proper" understanding of certain terms. Baptism for her is always submersion in the Spirit, not immersion in water.

This kind of interpretation is called eisegesis by biblical scholars. It means to read into a passage whatever you want it to mean. It is not exegesis, which is letting the passage speak for itself.

Another common cult practice, prooftexting, means deciding beforehand a belief and then trying to find a Scripture passage to provide proof for that position. The writings, broadcasts, and personal witness of Armstrongism, Mormons, and Jehovah's Witnesses are filled with examples of this improper method of Bible study.

Guidelines for Evaluating and Encountering Cults

As the Christian seeks to bear a positive witness to members of the cults, certain guidelines need to be remembered and followed.

Be convinced. Conversation with the cultist is not for the uncertain. Most cult members are very dogmatic about the correctness of their views. The Christian needs to be just as convinced about his faith in Jesus Christ and his commitment to that relationship. Examine your own faith and renew the wellsprings of your own spiritual strength.

Consider your attitude toward cultists. Make sure that it is one of love. The unbeliever is hostile and suspicious of those who differ from him. Some Christians find that their own attitudes have not changed much from their prebelief days. The Spirit helps us to see others as God sees them and to treat them with respect and love. Remember the admonition of 1 Peter 3:15-16: "Be ready at all times to answer anyone who asks you to explain the hope you have in you, but do it with gentleness and respect."[2]

Be courteous. Mormon missionaries and Jehovah's Witnesses expect rebuffs when they visit house to house. You will surprise them by being kind. Rejection by Baptists simply confirms their belief that they represent the one true church, for did not Jesus say, " 'You will be hated by all nations for my name's sake' " (Matt. 24:9)?[3]

Seek to gauge the cultist's commitment to his faith. Seek to understand what the person's faith means to him. Is he only attending the public meetings of the Local Church, or is he a member? If a Mormon, is he active or only nominal?

Every religious group has within it a range of persons from the devout to the nominal, from the prospect who is considering joining to the member who is considering leaving. Seek to measure how committed the person is to his faith and adjust your witness accordingly.

Stress personal experience. Center on the member's personal experience, not on the doctrinal beliefs of his group. Ask about his experience; sometimes it will be given readily, sometimes hesitantly. Listen to see if his testimony is canned or memorized or if it comes from the deepest wells of his being. (Test your own testimony for the same characteristics.) Members of cults who believe in salvation by works rarely have a sense of personal assurance, because they never know when they have worked enough to attain salvation. Emphasize your own experience in Christ and your own assurance of redemption as His gift.

Be clear. The same words are used by different religious groups to

mean different things, so be clear in your use of language. When the Moonie says that he believes in Jesus as the spiritual Savior of the world, watch that term *spiritual Savior*. By that he means that Jesus is only a partial Savior. The physical side of saving awaits the ministry of the coming Lord of the Second Advent (whom members of the Unification Church believe to be their founder, Sun Myung Moon).

You should know enough about other faiths to know their code words—what they mean when they say "Christ," "church," "engram," and "mingle." Do not hesitate to ask, "What do you mean by 'prophet'?" Check the meanings of the terms that are used.

Also be clear in the language you use about your faith. The cultist may not understand the meanings you attach to your "religious" words. Use illustrations, examples, and various words to describe the same experience. Ask, "Do you understand what I mean by the phrase 'salvation by faith alone'?"

Check for changes. We have already discussed some of the changes cults make in Christian beliefs that take them outside the bounds of orthodox Christianity. When you talk with a member of a cult, check what he believes about basic Christian beliefs. One of the rules of good interfaith witness is that you do not tell another person what he believes; you ask him. Although you may know that many Mormon leaders have taught that Jesus was a polygamist, that does not mean that the Mormon to whom you are speaking shares that belief. So ask, "Do you believe that Jesus was married?"

Check on the basic categories of authority, the view of Christ, the view of man, the concept of redemption, and how one is redeemed.

Determine how the cultist views you as a Christian: Does he think that your church is led by Satan? Does he accept your church as an authentic Christian body?

Compliment where you can; challenge where you must. You do not build up your own faith by tearing down the other person's. If you can commend beliefs or activities, do so. Compliment the Mormon and the Seventh-day Adventist on their concern for bodily health. Tell the Mormon that you appreciate the missionary zeal that puts more than thirty thousand young missionaries in the fields, with goals for growth realized annually.

But also be firm in stating where you believe they err in deviating from authentic biblical teachings. Tell the Mormon that the Bible, not any later book, is your basic written source of authority. Help the Moonie to understand that you believe Jesus is the complete Messiah, not a partial one who was a failure.

Be careful in the way the Bible is used, either by you or by the cultist. "Consider the context" is a good rule. Every time the Jehovah's Witness quotes a passage of Scripture, read it with her out of your Bible. Examine the paragraph, the page, and the book to see if the cultist has modified the meaning of the verse. Be cautious of those who quote Old Testament verses and try to apply them to New Testament or modern churches. It is obvious that no Christian churches existed before Christ, but some cults

disregard that historical fact.

Consider the content of the verses quoted by the cultist. Watch for allegorical treatments when none are intended. First Corinthians 15:29 is the sole scriptural ground for the Mormon practice of proxy baptism for the dead. Yet Paul was not commending the Corinthian church for this practice; he was condemning it. Mormons have established a ritual based on this verse to bring salvation to the dead.

Share your testimony. Express your own faith in Christ. Tell of your personal spiritual experience. Interpret for the cultist what it means for you to be a Christian, a Baptist, a member of your local church.

The more your testimony uses terms that have meaning to the cultist, the more the Holy Spirit can use it for His purposes. Share your faith in words designed to reach the cultist. Stress assurance of salvation with the millennial sect groups, for they have little confidence in this area. Stress the divinity of Christ to the mind groups and the call for complete dedication of all that you are—mind, body, soul, action.

Start with your neighbor. The best cultists to begin to relate to are not the young Mormon missionaries who come to your door. Share your faith first with a neighbor who is a member of a cult group. You will have more opportunities for continuing contact so that your life can witness as well as your words.

Do not close off contact. Effective interfaith witness leaves the door open for other opportunities to share and converse. Be ready to minister, to listen, to go back.

Call for a decision. Clearly present the plan of salvation and prayerfully call for a decision.

Personal Learning Activity 3

Write a short outline of what you would do if a cultist approached you and tried to persuade you to his way of thinking.

Resources

Southern Baptists have discovered multiple resources in the Interfaith Witness Department of the Home Mission Board. This department has produced a number of printed and audiovisual materials to help Baptists understand other faiths and increase their witness skills in relating to persons of other persuasions. A current list of pamphlets, belief bulletins, videos, and slide sets may be ordered from the Interfaith Witness Department.

In addition to these materials, the Interfaith Witness Department maintains a staff in Atlanta and appointed missionaries in regional centers to help Baptist churches, associations, and state conventions in conferences and encounter events.

Resources in interfaith witness are available in every state. Your state convention has named a person, usually on the state staff, to serve as

state interfaith witness coordinator. He plans the state strategy for interfaith witness and is aware of the resources available from the Home Mission Board.

Interfaith witness associates (IWAs) are probably the nearest resource. These volunteers have been trained and certified by the Interfaith Witness Department as resource persons in one subject (for example, Mormonism). They are available to talk with you or to come to your church to lead in a skillshop, increasing your awareness and equipping you for better witness to cultists. A list of certified IWAs is kept in your associational office, in the office of the state interfaith witness coordinator, and at the Home Mission Board, Atlanta, and regional offices.

Many associations provide leadership and training in interfaith witness to members of their churches. Efforts are made to survey the needs of the churches for relating to cultists and to plan activities that will foster interfaith witness.

Interfaith witness helps are contained in the Associational Missions Development materials. Similar helps are found in the Church Missions Development materials. They may be ordered from Customer Service at the Home Mission Board. Churches that want to become effective interfaith witnesses use this material to guide learning and action.

The Challenge for Contact

What results can be expected as you seek to relate to cultists? If yours is a vital, warm Christian witness, then the Jehovah's Witness will have input contrary to what his leaders have told him: that members of Christendom are cold, do not know their Bible, and have no sense of joy in their faith.

The Christian Scientist will have encountered a person who is also concerned about personal wholeness but who does not have to deny pain, disease, and death in order to attain it. The Moonie will be challenged that he cannot claim the name *Christian* for his group and continue to hold beliefs that are radically deviant from biblical teaching.

Some people went into cult groups seeking meaning for their lives. Some find within their cult a climate for growth. Others are still looking because they failed to find in the cult that for which they were searching. These persons may find in your words and life some directions that may lead them from their group to yet another community—the community of Christian faith, the church. They may shift their commitment from a cult, its leader, and its authority to the one God who has given Himself to us in the person of Jesus Christ.

Sense the possible impact of your witness and be active in sharing it.

Notes

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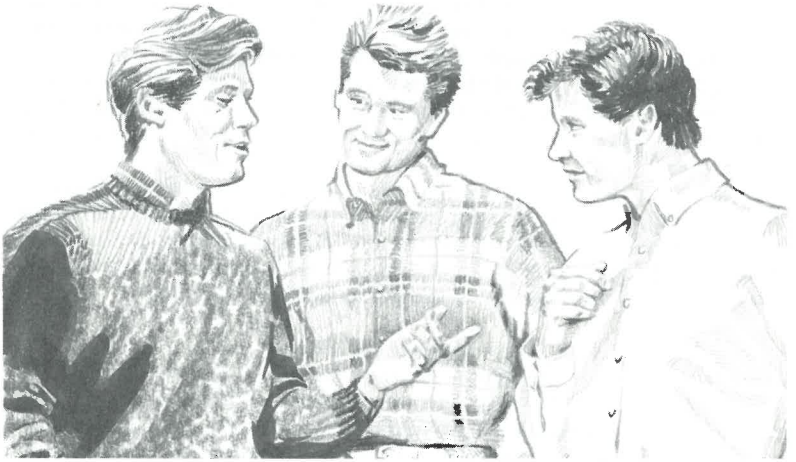
CHAPTER 2

Armageddon's Army: Jehovah's Witnesses

M. Thomas Starkes



Very few Southern Baptists have escaped being approached on the street or in their homes by a representative of Armageddon's army, Jehovah's Witnesses. Who are these people who will not salute our flag, deny the bodily resurrection of Christ, and deny the personality of the Holy Spirit? More important, how can Southern Baptists share their faith more effectively with Jehovah's Witnesses?

A History of the Movement

Although adherents of Jehovah's Witness doctrine insist that their beginning was in the mind and heart of God, the outside observer might well contend that the movement began in the person of Charles Taze Russell (1852-1916). Russell was an orthodox Congregationalist until one day in a poolroom he sought to defend logically the doctrine of hell against an opponent. Unable to do so, he began to question other Christian beliefs.

In 1880 Russell wrote *Food for Thinking Christians* and began a seven-volume work titled *Studies in the Scriptures*. In this later work, a type of commentary, Russell sought to apply reason to the Bible. A year earlier he had started publication of *The Watchtower* and served as its editor until his death. In 1879 he started the legal body of the international organization, the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, and served as its president until he died in 1916.

The second leader of the movement was "Judge" Joseph F. Rutherford (1869-1942), who guided the growth of the movement by writing twenty-two full-length books and dozens of pamphlets, circulating over 450 million pieces of literature, and boosting the number of missionaries. Rutherford initiated in earnest the idea of involving the whole congregation in door-to-door witnessing. He also began the use of billboards to publicize his pet phrase, "Millions now living will never die."

Rutherford was not among that number and was succeeded, upon his death, by Nathan Knorr (1905-1977). During the thirty-four years of Knorr's presidency of the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, the movement grew from 113,000 members in 54 countries to 2,000,000 in 210 countries. Knorr was instrumental in changing the image of the Witnesses by urging his door-to-door "salesmen" not to agitate against other faiths but to be jovially tactful. *New World Translation of the Holy Scriptures* was published during his presidency. Upon his death in 1977, Knorr was succeeded by Frederick W. Franz.

Growth of the Watchtower Society

Jehovah's Witnesses' growth may be attributed to four factors:

1. An emphasis on every member a minister.
2. Excellent training in Kingdom Hall meetings.
3. An effective door-to-door visitation program.
4. Availability of inexpensive literature.

Jehovah's Witnesses made 680 million hours of visitation in 1986 in their attempt to tell throughout the world the "news" that Jehovah's kingdom arrived in 1914 through King Jesus' defeat of the enemy Satan. This phenomenal number of people reached annually is due to the effective organization for witnessing. Each member of the group is considered a minister of the gospel; and he is given impetus, resources, and encouragement for this endeavor by a complex organization for witnessing.

In addition to door-to-door visitation, each Jehovah's Witness spends five hours in Kingdom Hall meetings weekly.

This exposure is made more effective by the voluminous literature produced by the group. *Awake!* magazine is produced in a quantity of over ten million copies twice a month and is second in circulation among the world's religious journals only because Witnesses also publish *The Watchtower,* with a circulation of over twelve million copies every two weeks. With a growth rate of 6 percent annually and a membership of 3.2 million in 1986, the Witnesses do indeed take their witnessing seriously.

Basic Doctrines

Jehovah's Witnesses rely heavily on their own brand of eschatology, the study of Last Things. For them the kingdom of heaven is at hand, and the end of the age is near. *Let God Be True,* Witnesses' Bible-study handbook arranged in twenty-six topics, partially explains their eschatology.

> Jehovah has not reigned over the whole earth since man's rebellion in Eden. . . . Jehovah used [Israel] to form a prophetic moving picture of

the government which will one day exercise dominion over all the earth, God's kingdom by Christ Jesus. Through unfaithfulness Israel lost her sovereignty and was carried into captivity to Babylon, in the year 607 B.C.[1]

Using Ezekiel 4:6 and Revelation 12:6,14, the group reasons that the reference is to 2,520 days or years; and by adding 2,520 to 607 BC, the conclusion is that God's rule was reestablished in AD 1914. That year is chosen also because of increased total wars, widespread famine, pestilences, and earthquakes. According to Witnesses, Jesus Christ returned to the temple of God in 1914 and cleansed it by 1918 for judgment of Satan and his followers. Jesus will not return again physically because He is already spiritually present. Nevertheless, Satan now is preparing for the impending battle of Armageddon. Jehovah will go against "all who hold to demonism" in this greatest of all battles. Following the battle, "the greater mass of humankind will find life here on earth amid paradise conditions."[2]

Not all of Jehovah's Witnesses expect to go to heaven. Citing Luke 12:32 and Revelation 7:4, they hold that God has limited to 144,000 the number of the body of Christ. For Witnesses, eventually everyone will belong to one of three categories: those who will enter a life in heaven with Jesus; those who will live forever in a paradise on this earth if they have been faithful Witnesses of Jehovah; and the wicked, who are stubbornly set against their conversion and will be annihilated and forgotten.

This final assertion brings the reader back to the beginning of the movement, when Russell repudiated the doctrine of a burning hell. *Let God Be True* states that the doctrine of a burning hell cannot be true for four reasons: It is wholly unscriptural (some Bible scholars may wonder about this), it is unreasonable, it is contrary to God's love, and it is repugnant to justice.[3]

Besides its unique brand of eschatology, the group holds other tenets of faith outside the mainstream of Christian thought. Jehovah's Witnesses reject the doctrine of the Trinity, saying that it is a creation of Satan. *The Watchtower* recorded: "The Scriptures clearly teach that Jehovah is the only true God . . . that the LOGOS was the beginning of his creation . . . that the LOGOS was made human as the man Jesus . . . that God raised up Jesus divine and exalted him to heaven above every other creature."[4]

Witnesses deny the bodily resurrection of the Lord Jesus and claim instead that he was raised as an "invisible spirit creature." This rebirth of the old heresy of Arianism, which stated that "Christ was the first of the creatures," was repudiated by church leaders in the fourth century after Christ.

In addition to their teaching that Jesus is a created being, Witnesses also deny the personality of the Holy Spirit, claiming that the Holy Spirit is a force or power of Jehovah. The name *Holy Spirit* is not capitalized in *New World Translation.*

Witnesses also hold that death is really unconsciousness or extinction. According to *Make Sure of All Things,* death is "loss of life; termination

of existence"[5] and can be proved by such texts as Psalm 6:5. The evangelical Christian's answer to the meaning of death is that the apostle Paul used the word *sleep* to picture physical death and that the spirits of those now in glory (1 Thess. 4:14) will be united with their resurrection bodies (1 Cor. 15). So physical death involves only the sleep of the body pending resurrection to immortality with Christ. The number 144,000 is not taken literally but means that God's perfect number will be in heaven. Witnesses teach that salvation is available only through the Watchtower Society. For them, salvation is earned by faith in Jehovah, baptism, moral cleanliness, and good works.

Inherent in all Jehovah's Witness beliefs is the concept that Jehovah is in direct control of history and allows Satan a temporary free reign over this wicked world. The group identifies Christendom (Christian groups) as perverters of the good news that Jesus has reigned in the temple since 1918 and blames Paul for "churchifying" the teachings of Jesus.

Few Witnesses are overly concerned with the life here on earth. They do not vote, and they believe that the world is so evil it is not worth saving. They predict the downfall of every government and maintain that our whole social system is a product of Christendom and reveals its satanic nature.

These statements of Witness doctrines represent points at which they are at greatest variance with evangelical Christianity, but nonetheless seriously so.

Personal Learning Activity 4

Outline the basic doctrines of Jehovah's Witnesses.

A Critical Analysis

One of the biggest problems in any religious discussion is that of authority. In what source can we find what we should believe? And how do we use that source? Jehovah's Witnesses appeal on the surface to many Bible-believing Baptists because they hold that their only source is the Word of God. The ultimate consideration, however, is how the Bible is used.

The method Witnesses employ to establish the "truth" is to support their findings by a long array of Bible quotations. Verses are taken at random from any part of the Bible, with little consideration for their context, that is, the period in which they were written, who wrote them, their background or historical meaning, and the subject of the surrounding verses or chapters.

The text of *New World Translation* has been changed to reflect Jehovah's Witnesses' beliefs. For example, "the Spirit of God" in Genesis 1:2 has been changed to "God's active force" to reflect the Society's teaching denying the personality of the Holy Spirit. *New World Translation* translates the word for *cross* as "torture stake." *New World Transla-*

tion mistranslates John 8:58 by making it read, "'Before Abraham came into existence, I have been.'" In truth, Jesus is proclaiming His divinity in that verse by referring directly to Exodus 3:14, in which God identifies Himself as "I AM." The word *other* has been added five times in Colossians 1:16-20 to reflect the Society's teaching that Jesus is a created being who created "all [other] things."

The individual Witness receives no encouragement to interpret his Bible for himself. The Watchtower Society does this for him, passing on the "truth" without question. An example appears in the Bible-study handbook *Let God Be True,* in which the writer quotes the Society's translation to prove that Christ is not equal to Jehovah God. *New World Translation* renders John 1:1, "The Word was a god." To the true Jehovah's Witness, the Society, not the Bible, is the final authority.

Having noted the difference in the use of the written Word, turn now to the Living Word—our risen Savior. Our radical surrender to a Christ who has conquered death and our awareness of His daily presence must not be sacrificed. As Paul phrased it, "If there be no resurrection of the dead, then is Christ not risen: And if Christ be not risen, then is our preaching vain, and your faith is also vain" (1 Cor. 15:13-14). We must affirm that the man Jesus was divine and will return as the firstfruits of victory over death to claim His followers.

Further, Baptists must avoid the heresy of becoming otherworldly to the extent of neglecting their neighbors. When Jesus spoke of the marks of a true disciple, He said, "By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another" (John 13:35). This love involves a wholesome attitude toward this world; otherwise, Jesus would never have taken time in His short ministry to preach the greatest guide to human living of all time—the Sermon on the Mount. By considering the total biblical witness, the Christian should deem it his responsibility to keep a healthy tension between his salvation in this world and his eternal hope in the coming Lord. Paul expressed this tension in 2 Corinthians 5:8-9: "We are confident, I say, and willing rather to be absent from the body, and to be present with the Lord. Wherefore we labour, that, whether present or absent, we may be accepted of him."

Witnessing to Jehovah's Witnesses

1. Be prepared to cite and explain specific biblical passages supporting basic Christian doctrines.
2. Have a basic knowledge of Jehovah's Witness doctrine. Ignorance that similar terms are usually redefined will severely hamper an effective witness.
3. Be patient. Jehovah's Witnesses are not promising prospects. Seldom is a Jehovah's Witness won to Christ in one encounter.
4. Have a definite plan or purpose before the witnessing encounter. Don't plan to "wing it." Keeping a 4-by-6-inch card with selected verses in your Bible may be helpful.
5. Keep the initiative in the encounter.
6. Clearly define your terms. Don't assume that the Jehovah's Witness

understands your terms. Remember that no genuine witness occurs unless meanings of commonly used terms are understood.

7. Try to get to know the Jehovah's Witness personally so he or she will be less defensive and suspicious.
8. Do not get sidetracked. Center the discussion on the person and work of Christ. The primary issue is a person's relationship with Christ, not why he should vote or salute the flag.
9. Lead the Jehovah's Witness to affirm that religion approved by God must agree with the Bible in all its details. Assure the Witness that you are also seeking to know God's truth, because, as Jesus said, "The truth shall make you free" (John 8:32). Emphasize that Jesus is the standard by which all religious teachings are to be tested (John 14:6; 18:37).
10. Jehovah's Witnesses believe that only God is to be worshiped. Show that Jesus was worshiped when He was on earth (Matt. 2:11; 14:33; 28:17; 28:9; John 9:38).
11. Jehovah's Witnesses deny the physical resurrection of Jesus, accepting only a spiritual resurrection. They admit temporary physical manifestations. Lead the Witness in a discussion of these verses: Luke 24:36-39; John 2:19-21; 20:26-29; Acts 1:9-11; 1 Corinthians 15:1-8; Revelation 1:7.
12. The following plan of salvation may be helpful in leading the Jehovah's Witness to faith in Christ.
    a. You are a sinner (John 3:18; Rom. 3:23; 6:23).
    b. You cannot save yourself (Acts 4:12; Eph. 2:8-10).
    c. You will perish without Christ (John 3:16,36).
    d. You can be saved now (John 1:12, Acts 16:31; Rom. 10:9).
    e. You must be a consistent, fruitful Christian after conversion (2 Tim. 2:15; Heb. 10:25).

Personal Learning Activity 5

Describe the process you would use to witness to a Jehovah's Witness.

What They Can Teach Us

Jehovah's Witnesses interest many people who have not engaged in intelligent, disciplined, in-depth Bible study. Witnesses and other cults know their Bible in a limited sense. Baptists need to have an enlightened knowledge of the Bible. This knowledge would keep laypersons from regarding prophetic books as hidden writings from which the knowledgeable Bible reader can predict everything from radios to rocket ships.

Southern Baptists severely need to discover and use hermeneutics, the science of comparing all related biblical texts to arrive at a common teaching, with appropriate attention to content and historical background. This discovery can come only when Baptists become concerned enough to use critical tools for the Bible study, disciplined by a respect

for God's Word. The Bible can come alive in this generation only if it is used with discretion and humility.

The most disturbing way in which Jehovah's Witnesses show a weakness among our fellowship is in the matter of door-to-door witnessing. Posters, magazines, and advertisements can never replace the person so "sold" on his Savior that he wants his neighbors to know Him. Assuredly, more discretion can be used in this evangelism than is used by Jehovah's Witnesses, but they have at least practiced what we preach, the priesthood of believers. They do not have the idea that a paid professional staff in a local church relieves them of their responsibility to witness.

In summary, the presence of Jehovah's Witnesses should make Southern Baptists prayerfully consider their lack of disciplined Bible study, concern for the social outcasts in their towns, and spiritual laziness in taking their faith in a risen Lord to the lost. Jehovah's Witnesses are in earnest about their faith. Are Southern Baptists as much in earnest about theirs?

Personal Learning Activity 6

Answer the following opinion questions.

1. What emphasis should Southern Baptists plan to prevent spiritual laziness in taking their faith to those in need?

_____

_____

2. How can our churches counteract the erroneous teachings of the Jehovah's Witness cult?

_____

_____

Notes

1. *Let God Be True* (Brooklyn: Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, Inc., 1946), pp. 250-51.
2. Ibid., p. 279.
3. Ibid., p. 99.
4. *The Watchtower,* December 1913.
5. *Make Sure of All Things* (Brooklyn: Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, Inc., 1953), p. 86.

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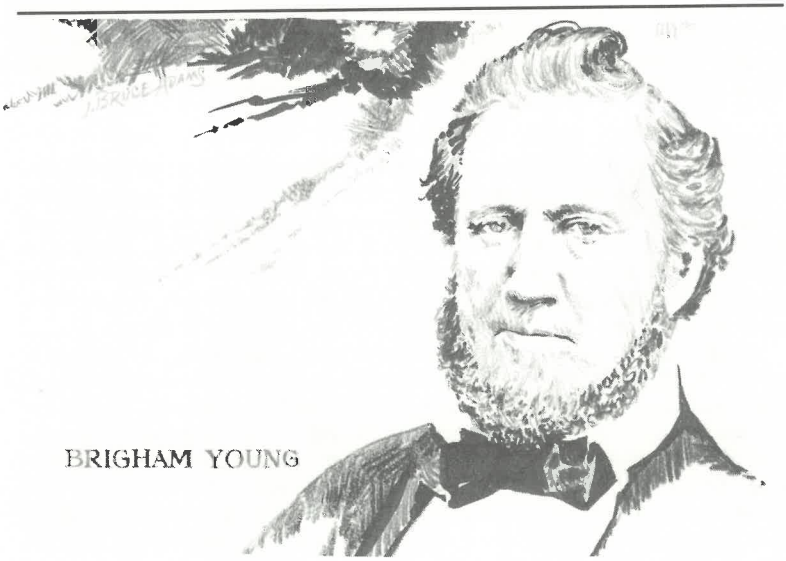
CHAPTER 3

Saints and the Baptist Witness

M. Thomas Starkes and Kate Ellen Gruver



Part 1

Latter-day Saints (LDS)

The presence of over five million American members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (LDS or Mormons) can hardly be ignored. Their annual income, estimated by some to exceed one billion dollars, and their total financial empire make the church one of the wealthiest religious institutions in the world. This fact contrasts sharply with the life of the poor farm boy named Joseph Smith, Jr., who had few assets except a vision of the "true" church.

The Mormon evangelistic effort reaches millions of American homes annually. This effort costs Mormons dearly. About one third of their young men between the ages of nineteen and twenty-five go on missions that last two years. Around thirty thousand young Mormons and a growing number of retired Mormons served as missionaries in 1987. Their families pay for their upkeep, a cost collectively involving over one million dollars per month for the members. The Mormons know the meaning of generosity in concerted mission effort.

The public image of the Latter-day Saints is aided by the fact that more than one million visitors to Salt Lake City each year take the guided tour through the Mormon Tabernacle. Mormons also enhance their image by emphasizing the similarities between their beliefs and those of Christians and initially ignoring their divergent beliefs, such as Jesus' having been a polygamist.

The modern Mormon is part of a powerful enterprise that shows promise of becoming even larger. No Christian should be unaware of the history and distinctive doctrines of the Latter-day Saints, unwilling to learn from Mormon strengths, or unable to point out clearly their basic weaknesses. Christians must not be too ill-equipped to relate their understanding of the Christian gospel to their Mormon friends.

History

The Mormon movement owes its inception to one man: Joseph Smith, Jr., who was born in Vermont late in 1805. The Smith family found it difficult to earn a living on the frontier, where hard work was as necessary as money was scarce. In 1816 they moved to Palmyra, New York, which was their twentieth move since Joseph's birth. The father often went on treasure-hunting expeditions, taking his likable son with him. His mother, Lucy Mack Smith, believed in magic and had spiritual visions.

Western New York in the first third of the nineteenth century was a center of religious fervor with almost no emphasis on an educated clergy. One historian referred to the area as the "burned-over district" because it had experienced so many religious upheavals. A popular topic of conversation was the identification of the "true" church. Religious communities frequently retreated to a separate existence to try their ideas on realizing the Americo-Christian dream. Most believers were convinced that their system of faith was correct and would not hesitate to begin a new splinter group to prove their point.

Joseph Smith, Jr., was a product of all these currents of thought. He set about to solve the problems they presented to the individual believer. Smith claimed to have had a vision in which he was told that, although he had been recently converted, he was to join no church since they all were wrong. Another significant revelation came three years later when Smith said an angel named Moroni appeared to him and gave him directions to a place where he might find some golden plates and their translating devices—the Urim and Thummim. The translation of the plates was to solve the problems of the origin of the mound-building Indians and of the way the Jews got to America. They were also to prove the fact that Jesus was the Messiah. Smith was forbidden to uncover the plates until four years later in September 1827.

On January 18, 1827, Smith married the former Emma Hale while serving as a guide on a search for buried treasure. Emma's father disliked the young ne'er-do-well, and the couple was forced to elope. When Smith allegedly brought home the plates, he decided it would be best to move away from family and neighbors. They moved back to Emma's former home in Harmony, Pennsylvania, where Emma served as the first scribe

for the translation.

The effort was financed by Martin Harris, a well-to-do farmer who had confidence in the young "prophet" and who was extremely interested in the origin of the Indians. Harris moved to Harmony to take over the job of scribe early in 1828. Smith and Harris worked for two months, and the scribe then took more than one hundred pages of transcription to New York to his wife, who destroyed or hid the work.

A revelation told Smith that he was not to give the same translation again verbatim but to begin again with a new scribe. The work progressed much faster with a young schoolteacher, Oliver Cowdery, as his aide. The book was soon finished and ready for publication. The first edition of five thousand copies came in 1830, financed by Martin Harris's mortgaging of his farm.

Smith could now focus his attention on the formation of the new church. Less than two weeks after the publication of *The Book of Mormon,* on April 6, 1830, in Fayette, New York, the Church of Christ was started with six members. Joseph was designated as "Seer, a translator, a Prophet, an Apostle of Jesus Christ." Within thirty days the young church had forty members and by the end of 1831 had grown to more than one thousand. Later it changed its name to the Church of Jesus Christ and, in 1837, to its present name.

The group was actively missionary from the beginning. Four missionaries including Cowdery went west to Ohio and helped convert a former Campbellite preacher, Sidney Rigdon, who persuaded his whole congregation of 127 members to become Mormons. Back in New York, Joseph Smith's neighbors had belittled and antagonized him to the point that he and some sixty followers set forth early in 1831 to Kirtland, Ohio, where Rigdon's group awaited them. There the first temple was erected; the priestly organization of the church was established; mission work to Missouri was launched; and a young man named Brigham Young joined the movement.

The sojourn at Kirtland also produced Smith's important declaration, the "Word of Wisdom," which counseled church members to abstain from alcohol, hot drinks (coffee and tea), and tobacco. Another document that Smith produced at Kirtland was *The Book of Abraham,* which he "translated" from Egyptian papyri that he claimed were the writings of Abraham. Egyptologists have since stated that the papyri were common Egyptian funeral documents. *The Book of Commandments* (later renamed *Doctrine and Covenants*), the collected "revelations" of Smith, was also written or begun.

Smith later led his group of followers to Far West, Missouri, where over one thousand Mormons had already settled. The Missourians feared and distrusted the Mormons and began a series of persecutions, forcing Smith and his now more than two thousand followers to flee early in 1839 to Illinois. There, out of swampland along the Mississippi River, they built their city of Nauvoo.

Smith assured his followers that *Nauvoo* meant *beautiful plantation* in Hebrew, and he set about to make it just that. By the end of 1840 it was

the largest city in the state. A year later the state of Illinois issued Nauvoo a charter making it an independent city-state with its own military and judicial system. The University of Nauvoo was officially started but existed practically in name only. Another temple was constructed but was later destroyed by fire and a tornado.

The Mormons lived in relative peace until 1844, when a group became disgruntled or disillusioned with Smith's pronouncements and practices. They founded a newspaper, *The Nauvoo Expositor,* in which they attacked him, accusing him, among other injustices, of practicing polygamy. Smith denied the charges and had the newspaper office destroyed and all available copies of *The Nauvoo Expositor* burned. Illinois's Governor Ford arrested Smith and several of his followers to stand trial for the charges brought by the editors of the newspaper. They were taken to Carthage, Illinois, to await trial. Smith and his brother Hyrum were jailed. On June 27, 1844, the two were killed while defending themselves from an irate mob that stormed the jail.

The Mormons had lost their founder and leader. A controversy arose almost immediately concerning his successor. One group, led by Smith's widow, thought that the mantle should be placed on Joseph Smith III, then only twelve years old. Sidney Rigdon also claimed to be Smith's true successor but was denied the presidency by a vote of the members, who chose Brigham Young instead. It was Young who organized and led the famous trek of two thousand members from Illinois to Utah, beginning in 1846.

Young's leadership was very important for overcoming despondency, cold, poverty, and Indians. He led in transforming the valley of the Great Salt Lake into a flourishing agricultural area. At the time of his death in 1877, there were over 140,000 Mormons.

The authorization of polygamy was officially announced at the Mormon conference in 1852, and soon new polygamous settlements appeared as far away as Mexico and Canada. Mormon prophet Wilford Woodruff suspended the practice of polygamy in 1890, although it remains a divine LDS doctrine. The Salt Lake City Tabernacle was completed in 1867.

The current president is Ezra Taft Benson, who served in the Eisenhower administration as the Secretary of Agriculture.

Personal Learning Activity 7

Write down the significant events in the history of the Mormons.

A Question of Authority

The basic question in all comparative religions is that of authority; that is, what source does one consult to learn what he is to do or believe? Baptists have traditionally stated that their sole written authority is the Bible. Mormons contend that the Bible is a reliable authority on religion only when translated correctly and that it is supplemented by a revelation to a

latter-day prophet. This process is called progressive revelation.

Christians agree with the principle that God reveals Himself to every generation through His distinctive written source—the Bible. The difference comes in the question of whether a subsequent written revelation is needed. The inherent worth of the Bible is that God speaks with meaning through the Scriptures in every new epoch.

The Book of Mormon is the outstanding extrascriptural written source for the Latter-day Saints. It is a prime example of a modern revelation that rapidly becomes outdated. For the pioneer, western New York farmer of the 1830s, a frequently discussed question was the origin of the Indian mounds and of the red men who built them. *The Book of Mormon* was added to the impressive bibliography that sought to answer a contemporary question on the American frontier a century and a half ago, but which occupies little time in our thought pattern near the end of the twentieth century.

Mormons claim that *The Book of Mormon* is a collection of books originally written between the years 600 BC and AD 451. It allegedly deals with the history of the relation between God and His chosen people in the Western Hemisphere.

According to this work, one colony of Jews, composed mainly of people from the tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh, departed from Jerusalem in the year 600 BC under the leadership of a prophet named Lehi. They landed in South America. Soon after their arrival two of Lehi's sons—Nephi and Laman—fought, and the people chose sides. God was for Nephi, and He cursed the Lamanites with dark skin; they became the forerunners of the American Indians. The Nephites migrated northward to Central America and were there when Christ visited them right after His crucifixion.

The two factions began to fight again in the third century AD, and by 384 the Nephites were virtually destroyed. The Nephites were led by a prophet-priest named Mormon who, just before the last battle, wrote a history of his people on some golden plates and gave it to his son, Moroni. Moroni hid the plates in what is now New York; almost fifteen hundred years later he appeared to Joseph Smith to tell him about the plates.

The Book of Mormon is made up of fourteen books and an editorial note. The style is similar to that of the King James Version of the Bible. The book is about six hundred pages long. Some passages are direct quotes from the King James Version, including twenty-one chapters from Isaiah. Third Nephi 13:1-18 is identical to Matthew 6:1-23.

The names used are closely related to those of biblical characters. They may be exactly alike, such as Laban and Lemuel, or close imitations, such as Laman. The finding of a promised land recalls Moses; the daughter of Jared dances before a king; and Alma's conversion is similar to Paul's.

Non-Mormon students of intellectual history have frequently pointed to the fact that *The Book of Mormon* is far from original in thought and reflects currents of thought common to the intellectual ferment of the early nineteenth century. One popular theory, that Smith borrowed from

an earlier manuscript written by Solomon Spaulding, a preacher, seems to have been discounted by recent research.[1] Another theory is that Smith borrowed from a writing by Ethan Smith, a Vermont pastor, who wrote *View of the Hebrews* in 1823 and reported that the Indians "had not long since had a book which they had *for a long time preserved.* But having lost the knowledge of reading it, they concluded it would be of no further use to them; and they buried it with an Indian chief."[2]

Major parallels between the two works are frequent references to the destruction of Jerusalem, inspired prophets among the ancient Americans, long quotations from Isaiah, pictures of the ancient Indians as a highly civilized people, and the translation of ancient documents by use of the Urim and Thummim. Joseph Smith obviously borrowed from other writings and thought patterns of his day and embellished them.

Non-Mormon textual and historical critics of Smith's chief revelation have pointed to historical and archaeological anachronisms contained therein, such as the presence of horses, cows, oxen, and elephants in the Western Hemisphere before the birth of Christ (Ether 9:18-19). No cities, names, or writings in *The Book of Mormon* have been found by archaeologists.

The Latter-day Saints include other works in their list of sacred literature. *The Pearl of Great Price* contains *The Book of Moses* of 1830 and *The Book of Abraham,* the latter allegedly a translation of ancient Egyptian records that tell of Abraham in Egypt. *The Pearl* concludes with a portion of Matthew 24, Joseph Smith's own story of his early work, and the Articles of Faith.

Doctrine and Covenants was first published in Kirtland, Ohio, in 1835. The Utah edition contains 138 revelations attributed mostly to Smith. The current edition also includes the declaration prohibiting polygamy, issued in 1890 by President Wilford Woodruff and the 1978 declaration allowing blacks to receive the priesthood. Especially relevant to modern Mormons are the revelations about baptism for the dead and celestial marriage.

The Mormons frequently refer to the "Word of Wisdom," which is section 89 of *Doctrine and Covenants.* This revelation, given to Joseph in Kirtland in 1833, proclaimed: "Strong drinks are not for the belly. . . . And all saints who remember to keep and do these sayings, walking in obedience to the commandments, . . . shall find wisdom and great treasures of knowledge, even hidden treasures." This revelation helps to account for the fact that devout Mormons do not drink even hot tea or coffee.

The question of revelation remains: Does the Bible require further written authority for clarification and supplementation of its concepts? The modern Mormon answers in the affirmative. A Mormon study book published in 1958 contains this statement: "We appeal to the Bible to prove that the truths received through the restoration of the gospel are in accord with its teachings."[3] The author continues with a typical Mormon handling of the Bible: "If we had no Bible we would still have all the needed direction and information through the revelations of the Lord to

his servants the prophets in these latter-days."[4]

The Bible is used primarily to verify later revelations. Richards supplies one reference to the Bible's meaning.

> When one compares this complete explanation of the calling and duties and organization of the seventy with the meager account contained in the Bible, he is convinced of the need for instruction and revelation from the Lord in these matters, since the Bible fails to give a sufficient account of the duties and calling of the seventy. Again we obtain this information and instruction by revelation from heaven, and we use the Bible to prove its truth.[5]

Here the non-Mormon finds in print the Latter-day Saints' attitude toward the Bible, which becomes a secondary source for determining thought and practice. It is supplemented by sources that are full of contradictions within themselves and with Scripture. The new, modern revelations are supposedly fuller explanations of the Bible, which is seen as inadequate in such central matters of the faith as the natures of God and man. The Mormon stance is clear: The Bible is to be used when it agrees with latter-day revelations. Many Christians find it difficult to believe that God would change His stance. Surely there must be a divine certainty about divine matters.

The key issue is whether the Holy Spirit speaks to the believer adequately in the Bible and in Christ. For the Mormons His work needs to be supplemented by further words that add meaning to an "inadequate" Bible. The matter of the Bible's witness to Christ takes secondary precedence in modern revelation to practical matters such as church organization for the Mormon. Classical Christians have found that God reveals Himself most clearly in Christ as seen through the Bible. Alleged subsequent revelations have tended to detract from following Christ in discipleship.

The latter-day revelations of the Mormons contradict themselves, contradict the biblical witness, and do not result in deeper devotion to Christ as Lord!

Personal Learning Activity 8

What are two extrascriptural resources that Mormons use? Beside each one write its contribution to their faith.

1. _____

_____

2. _____

_____

Latter-day Doctrines

Mormons believe that God intervened in American history to set up the one "true" church: the church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. All other churches are said to be in a state of apostasy.

The Mormons have combined restorationist views toward revelation with the American dream. They believe that the true Zion (new Jerusalem) will be built in America in what is now Independence, Missouri. They contend that prophecy is being fulfilled in Salt Lake City today, such as Jeremiah's prophetic reference to the Mormon Tabernacle Choir when he spoke of singing in Zion (see Jer. 31:12).

The doctrinal system that the "true" church and its prophets produced combined themes based on Campbellite thought, frontier dreams, pragmatic schemes for self-improvement, and biblical truth.

God is portrayed as a sort of superhuman with a physical body. Scriptural references to the contrary (see John 4:24, for example) are either ignored or reinterpreted through the Mormons' "inspired version" of the Bible. Further revelation to Joseph Smith "settles" the issue: "God himself was once a man as we are now, and is an exalted man, and sits enthroned in yonder heavens."[6] Section 130 of *Doctrine and Covenants* (Utah version) states, "The Father has a body of flesh and bones as tangible as man's." In other words, God is God because He has risen to godhood by His own efforts and consequent worthiness. He stands as an example to any man, who may do the same.

Jesus Christ, according to Mormon theology, was a Spirit Child of God and one of His wives (as are all human beings) and the literal, physical Son of God and Mary. Mormon writings trace Jesus' descent through Bathsheba, with the observation that, if David had not been a polygamist, there might not have been a Messiah.

Man is held to be an eternal being who lived before coming to earth. On the basis of what man does here, he supposedly lives and grows in the life beyond the grave. Joseph Smith promised that eternal life consists of learning how to be gods: "By going from one small degree to another . . . until you . . . are able to dwell in everlasting burnings, and to sit in glory, as to those who sit enthroned in everlasting power."[7]

Mormons speak out often against what they term the false doctrine of one heaven and one hell. There will be, according to them, grades and stations in heaven. *Doctrine and Covenants* speaks of three levels of salvation: the Celestial, Terrestrial, and Telestial Kingdoms. Mormons in the Celestial Kingdom are presently in an intermediate state called Paradise and will eventually be gods. The only persons eligible for this highest realm are those sealed in celestial marriage in the temple.

The Terrestrial Kingdom will be peopled with Christians and members of other religions who did not accept the Mormon message. The Telestial Kingdom is reserved for the wicked of the world who await the final resurrection.

Mormon eschatology reflects a conglomeration of biblical imagery, American idealism, and an early Greek concept of the preexistence of souls. The biblical language of Paradise, millennium, judgment, and souls

is combined with the idea of Christ's reigning in Missouri in a manner designed to appeal to Americans searching for God's special providence for this land of opportunity. The American ideal of hard work with just rewards is elevated to the degree that one's remuneration for industriousness stops nothing short of godhood, provided he is true to the Mormon Church.

Mormons invest much time and effort in their practice of baptism for the dead because they believe that the soul for whom the baptism ceremonies are performed will, of course, approve of them and be saved. This baptism is practiced in response to a revelation that came to Joseph Smith in 1836.

Despite evidence to the contrary, a Mormon writer claimed that the doctrines are "inspiring . . . *reasonable,* logical, consistent, and harmonious with all other scriptures and with the known *facts* of science and of history."[8]

The discrepancies between Mormon history and archaeological evidence have already been mentioned. Contradictions between *The Book of Mormon* and the New Testament have been pointed out. The student of Mormon doctrine should also be aware of disharmony even within the revelations unique to LDS literature. One example among the many suffices to make it clear that the prophet Joseph Smith was inconsistent in recording God's "revelations" to him. Using Abraham as an example of polygamy, Smith recorded in section 132 of the Utah *Doctrine and Covenants:* "God commanded Abraham, and Sarah gave Hagar to Abraham to wife. And why did she do it? Because this was the law, and from Hagar sprang many people. . . . Go ye, therefore, and do the works of Abraham; enter ye into my law, and ye shall be saved." *The Book of Mormon,* on the other hand, records God as being against polygamy: "Wherefore, I the Lord God will not suffer that this people shall do like unto them of old. . . . For there shall not any man among you have save it be one wife; and concubines he shall have none; for I, the Lord God, delight in the chastity of women" (Jacob 2:26-28).

A close scrutiny of Mormon doctrine reveals an amalgamation of inconsistencies, promises of eventual godhood and a Celestial Kingdom here in America. The questions of Christian ethics and eventual personal destiny are the same as those posed in the Bible, but the answers are far from the same.

Due to these and other weaknesses, modern-day Mormonism is faced with a silent apostasy, a falling away of young intellectuals in the church. They face three basic choices: adhering to the official doctrines of the church, based on literal interpretation of their scripture; apostasy and deserting the Mormon tradition; or an open discussion of critical problems within the Mormon thought world. A number have chosen the not-so-silent third alternative, and some of these subscribe to *Dialogue: a Journal of Mormon Thought,* a quarterly publication that examines Mormon views of history and doctrine. Some have found that close scrutiny of Mormon thought and practice leaves them no alternative but to abandon the framework of the church.

Salvation for the Saints

When speaking of the doctrine that Christians call salvation, Mormons often use the term *exaltation*. This means that their goal is to become the same as God, who they believe was also once a man, as were all the other gods. According to the doctrine of the preexistence of souls, they were first the spirit sons of God before experiencing human birth into the world. Acceptance of the Mormon faith and strict obedience to its laws and ordinances will enable them to continue in this relationship.

Two of the Articles of Faith explain the official Mormon stance on salvation.

3. We believe that through the atonement of Christ all mankind will be saved, by obedience to the laws and ordinances of the Gospel.
4. We believe the first principles and ordinances of the Gospel are: first, faith in the Lord Jesus Christ; second, repentance; third, baptism by immersion for the remission of sins; fourth, laying on of hands for the gift of the Holy Ghost.

Mormons believe that Christ was also a Spirit Son of the eternal God and that He died on the cross to pay the price of Adam's sin in the Garden of Eden. Thus, people are freed from that necessity and must answer only for their own sins.

Mormons take seriously the role of human works in the process of salvation. One is never sure of his salvation or exaltation until he is allowed to enter the Celestial Kingdom, the highest of three heavens. A modern writer warns the Saints: "Only a small percentage of the Church members will eternally retain their membership in the Church. Permanent membership in the Church is based upon worthiness. We must prove ourselves. All who register do not graduate."[9]

Latter-day Saints view as heretical any attempt at salvation through faith alone. A Mormon writer phrased it clearly.

> One erroneous teaching of many Christian churches is: *By faith alone we are saved.* This false doctrine would . . . teach man that no matter how great the sin, a confession would bring him complete forgiveness and salvation. What the world needs is more preaching of the necessity of abstaining from sin and living useful and righteous lives and less preaching of forgiveness of sin.[10]

Mormon creeds about salvation stand as a clear warning to the Christian who claims to be forgiven but who flippantly disregards the laws of God after his initial experience with Him. However, this does not negate the biblical truth that salvation comes only through a believing trust in Jesus Christ—the clear revelation of the nature and love of God (John 3:16).

Mormon Morality

By many standards, Mormons are good, moral people. They are indus-

trious, resourceful, patriotic, and temperate. They are, at least technically, not allowed to smoke or drink alcohol or even hot coffee or tea. These Saints must also give 10 percent of their gross income to their church.

Mormons are known as people who care for their own members. Since 1936 they have had a church welfare program that distributes life's necessities to the poor, finds jobs for their unemployed, and improves living conditions among their low-income families. The Latter-day Saints are certainly to be commended for their Christlike concern in caring for the social needs of their members.

The first federal bill to prohibit polygamous marriages was introduced into the United States Congress in 1860. Edmunds Law of 1881 imposed heavy fines and imprisonments on polygamists as well as denied them the right to vote. All this led to the manifesto from Mormon president Wilford Woodruff in September 1890, which stated the intention of the Utah group to submit to the law on plural marriage. Seven of the thirteen LDS presidents have been polygamists. At no time, however, did more than 15 percent of the total Mormon membership participate in polygamy.

Joseph Smith's heavy reliance on the Old Testament shows most clearly in the ethical system that results from his teachings. He stressed a communal relationship with strong ties of fellowship and practical guidelines to care for the needy similar to the Hebrew commonwealth. Unfortunately, the same negative attitude toward the stranger prevalent in the Old Testament, along with the supposed curse on certain descendants of Noah, prevails in the Mormon establishment. The same second-class position of women evident in Jewish life, BC, can be seen today in the Mormon concept of marriage. The statement that Mormons are good people must be understood in light of the fact that they have failed to emphasize sufficiently the New Testament ethic, especially the life and teachings of Christ in relation to women and "Samaritans."

Latter-day Saints' Organization

The Mormon church is divided into stakes, wards, and independent branches. The ward has its own building and is comparable to the local church. It ranges in size from 250 to 1,200 members, with about 750 considered an ideal size. An independent branch is similar to a mission and generally has from 50 to 250 members. The "pastor" of the ward is the bishop, who exercises authority over local matters in the church. Every Mormon must belong to a specific ward. A stake is a larger grouping of wards similar to an association.

Almost one fourth of all Mormons have been ordained to act in some official capacity for the church, mostly in the priesthood. The lower priesthood, called the Aaronic, includes deacons, males ages twelve through fourteen; teachers, ages fifteen through seventeen; and priests, ages eighteen and nineteen. At age twenty the young man enters the higher or Melchizedek priesthood and is designated an elder, signifying adulthood. Elders may ordain other elders and perform all the ordinances

of the church in the absence of a high priest. The rank of "seventy" is above the elders and refers to a traveling evangelist who works under the high priests.

Seventy-two men form the elite of Mormon leadership. They are referred to as the general authorities. The first presidency consists of the president of the church and his two counselors. These three high officials are elected by the Council of Twelve Apostles, who are next in the line of jurisdiction. The seven presidents of the presiding quorum of the seventy are next in order of authority. Officially, all of these three levels are equal in authority but only theoretically and by unanimous vote.

The pattern of the early church in its ministry is followed by the Latter-day Saints in name only, with little attention given to what might have been the specific function of each position in the loose association of churches as reflected in the New Testament. The effectiveness of the Mormon approach to leadership does not lie in its strict adherence to the New Testament pattern. It derives its strength from the sense of importance almost every Mormon male feels from being given some responsibility along with a high-sounding title. The Saints' stakes and wards offer a tight-knit and effective organization for recruiting and nurturing Mormon converts.

What Mormons Can Teach Us

The Latter-day Saints have shown a great capacity for growth in the United States. Several factors contribute to their rapid spread despite their unbiblical doctrine. A primary factor is that most Mormons are "true believers"; that is, they are willing to debate and fight, if necessary, for their beliefs. Their certainty is based on careful education and training within their wards.

Their doctrine is inherently reasonable when presented in its fashion and with its presuppositions, such as man's innate capacity for godhood. Often these presuppositions are sufficiently mingled with a careful stress on the parallels between Mormonism and traditional Christianity to proselyte those who call themselves Christians. Other religious groups might well emulate Mormons' stress on training in correct doctrine but not their extrabiblical source of authority.

Mormons take advantage of a common philosophy of religion suggesting that if one lives morally, then his doctrines do not really matter. The Mormon welfare system and the abstinence from unhealthy physical habits commend Mormonism to outside observers who have not closely examined Mormon doctrine. This concern for those in distress and for self is a part of the Christian faith that we should take seriously if we hope to impress on the Mormon correct beliefs about the eternal nature of God the Father and Christ. A reemphasis on the doctrine of the value of man in his uniqueness and "response-ability" is in order for all Christians.

The mission program, which sends young persons out to invest two years of their lives, has been a very effective method of Mormon proselyting. Other religious groups, such as Southern Baptists, have similar two-year programs, called US-2 and Missionary Journeyman programs,

which stress a deeper involvement with human problems than mere house-to-house discussions. Information on these programs, and on others for even shorter periods of time, are available from the Missionary Personnel Department at the Home Mission Board and from the Foreign Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention. These periods allow one to decide if God is leading to a lifelong, specialized ministry to people in spiritual and physical need.

The Mormon system of theological institutes and seminaries also deserves closer examination and possible emulation. Institutes of religion are maintained near colleges across the United States. The seminaries are located adjacent to high schools, and their courses are often accredited through the public school system. This educational system helps to conserve the young students for the Mormon faith.

How to Witness to a Latter-day Saint

Most Mormons have not critically examined their history and doctrinal development. The witness may want to use material such as this to begin a discussion.

The concerned Christian should keep in mind several general hints for meaningful witness to a Mormon. One is to be aware that the typical Mormon is not a promising prospect. Months of cultivative relationships will often be necessary, and patience will be required. Laypersons trained in friendship evangelism and interfaith witness can be effective witnesses. At least a rudimentary knowledge of Mormonism will prove helpful.

The discussion of the various denominations should be avoided in favor of presenting a positive emphasis on the love of God as shown in Christ. Many Latter-day Saints have memorized set answers to doctrinal matters, such as the nature and work of God. Discussion of these questions should go beyond the prooftext method of debate, which often creates more heat than light.

Each opportunity for witness should heavily emphasize personal experience and what discipleship to Christ means to the witness in the present as well as at the beginning point of conversion. Be certain that all terms are clearly understood. The whole set of experiences must be undergirded with prayer and the distinct leadership of the Holy Spirit. A discussion of Luke 18:9-14 may provide an opening for presenting the plan of salvation.

Max Stilson gives a helpful list of Scriptures that might be used to answer possible excuses given by Mormons as to why they will not respond to the opportunity for salvation in Christ. These include:

- I will have to give up too much—Mark 8:34-38.
- My relatives oppose it—Matthew 10:32-39.
- I cannot believe what I cannot understand—1 Corinthians 2:9-16.[11]

These verses and others about salvation should be used *after* the Mormon is receptive to the authority of the Bible and to a personal relation with Christ based on the forgiveness of sin.

Part 2

Latter Day Saints (RLDS)

It has been estimated that around one hundred other groups accept the authenticity of Joseph Smith, Jr., and *The Book of Mormon* but reject the leadership of the Utah Church, as well as the name *Mormon*. The largest body of these Saints is known as the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, with headquarters in Independence, Missouri. They stem from the Saints who did not follow Brigham Young to Utah. Among these were Smith's widow, his three young sons, and other family members.

After Smith's death many of this group felt that his successor should be his eldest son, Joseph III, then only twelve years old. Obviously, a child could not assume such a position, but the feeling remained. In addition, they grew dissatisfied with Brigham Young and rejected the doctrines of polygamy and plural gods, which they claimed were not permitted by either Joseph Smith or *The Book of Mormon* but which Young claimed were actually revelations to Smith. These disagreements led to a complete break with the Utah Mormons in 1852.

The eastern group reorganized, and in 1860 Joseph Smith III accepted the presidency as the "Prophet, Seer, and Revelator," the rightful successor to his father. He has been succeeded in turn in the office by three of his sons: Frederic M. Smith, Israel A. Smith, and W. Wallace Smith, who was succeeded by his son, Wallace B. Smith, in 1978.

A new emphasis on evangelism and expansion accounts for the spread of new congregations in many areas where RLDS have not previously been known.

Theologically, although they accept Joseph Smith, Jr., as the divinely chosen modern-day prophet to the world, RLDS follow more closely than Mormons main doctrines accepted by Baptists relating to the Trinity, to each Person thereof, and to salvation. Two primary differences are: (1) They accept Joseph Smith's "inspired version" of the Bible, with all the textual changes he made supporting his "restored religion" as a higher authority than the Bible as we know it; and (2) they believe, according to Smith's revelations, that Independence, Missouri, is the location of the Garden of Eden and the site of the future city of Zion, the new Jerusalem, the place where Christ will return.

The differences between these Latter Day Saints (RLDS) and the Latter-day Saints (Mormons or LDS) are more numerous. The RLDS's rejection of polygamy and plural gods, promoted by Brigham Young, also includes all the ramifications of those doctrines upon which the Mormon or LDS system has been developed. This accounts for the fact that in the past all the efforts and energies of the church, according to one official, have been expended in making clear the RLDS position on these points. Hence their failure to give much attention to an evangelistic outreach.

Today, however, Latter Day Saints are beginning to concentrate their efforts in a more active worldwide evangelism. Southern Baptists may well expect to hear more about these people in the future.

Personal Learning Activity 9

What are the differences between the Latter-day Saints and the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints?

Notes

1. See Fawn M. Brodie, *No Man Knows My History* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1966), p. 433, and William J. Whalen, *The Latter-day Saints in the Modern Day World* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1967), p. 38.
2. Ethan Smith, *View of the Hebrews,* 2nd ed. (Poultney, VT: Smith & Schuyt, 1825), p. 223.
3. Le Grand Richards, *A Marvelous Work and a Wonder,* rev. ed. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Company, 1958), p. 1.
4. Ibid., p. 41.
5. Ibid., p. 150.
6. Joseph Fielding Smith, *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith,* p. 345.
7. Ibid., pp. 346-47.
8. John J. Stewart, *The Glory of Mormonism* (Salt Lake City: Mercury Publishing Company, Inc., 1963), p. 239.
9. Ibid., p. 242.
10. Richards, pp. 25-26.
11. Max Stilson, *How to Deal with Mormons* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1965), p. 53.

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CHAPTER 4

The World Tomorrow: the Worldwide Church of God

Lloyd Niles Whyte

Until his death in 1986, probably more people heard Herbert W. Armstrong on the radio or television or read his literature than most other twentieth-century evangelists. Hundreds of radio and TV stations still carry "The World Tomorrow" programs featuring the particular view of the Worldwide Church of God, formerly known as the Radio Church of God. And for more than fifty years, *The Plain Truth* magazine has been sent free of charge to anyone who requests it.

With a worldwide membership estimated between 75,000 and 125,000, the Worldwide Church of God continues to grow under the leadership of Armstrong's handpicked successor, Joseph W. Tkach. It appeals to conservative, God-honoring, middle- and upper-class Americans, many of whom are at first unaware that Armstrong's skillfully disguised doctrinal position and teachings are not the sound, fundamental Bible doctrines they seem to be.

History

Born in Des Moines, Iowa, in 1892, Armstrong spent his early adult life moving from one job to another: "selling want ads, taking public opinion polls, pushing hardware, peddling soap and mud packs door-to-door,"[1] and engaging in other similar work. During these years he learned three things that were to be the key to his success in later life: that he could change persons' attitudes by manipulating their emotions, the principles of effective advertising, and some rules of persuasion.

In the fall of 1926, angered by a neighbor's attempt to lead Mrs. Armstrong to accept the Adventist view of the sabbath, Armstrong began his first real study of the Bible and "discovered" the ten lost tribes of Israel as the British and American people.

At the time he was a member of the Church of God, having previously been a member of several other religious groups. In 1931 he was ordained a minister in the church, but when this group rejected his theory of the lost tribes, he broke his affiliation to start his own religious group. The next year he preached his first sermon; and in 1934 from Eugene, Oregon, Armstrong broadcast his first "The World Tomorrow" program.

Armstrong boasted that God selected him to reveal the biblical "plain truth." Strongly influenced in his religious understanding by Adventists, Mormons, Anglo-Israelites, Jehovah's Witnesses, and Old Testament legalism, he used his gifts in promotion and public relations as well as his knowledge and experience in successful advertising to appeal to persons who want "Bible answers" to perplexing questions.

While Armstrong sought to supply these answers, often using Scripture out of context, he was not at all reluctant to claim to have the answers to other great issues as well. A sampling of these, dealt with in *The Plain Truth,* includes such matters as abortion, international affairs, business, the world oil crisis, the biological revolution, farming, the common market, parent-child relationships, home gardening, the good life, marriage, and others.

After a power struggle in the Worldwide Church of God in 1978, Garner Ted Armstrong, who often preached on "The World Tomorrow" programs, was excommunicated by his father. The younger Armstrong formed his own church, the Church of God International. Its membership has remained around five thousand since its formation. He continues to accept his father's theology.

Teachings of the Church

A basic teaching of the Worldwide Church of God is that the gospel was

not preached between AD 69 and 1933, when Armstrong began the Radio Church of God. The work of the Worldwide Church of God is the only one recognized by God today.

Armstrong leaned heavily on the Old Testament for his understanding of the character and personality of what he called "the true God." He saw Him as a strongly legalistic, judgmental God demanding exacting obedience to His will, with little emphasis on the New Testament concept of God's love and mercy. At this point Armstrong's doctrine of God departs from anything known in either the Old or New Testament. He taught that God is a divine Family, the members of which are the Father and the Son, who are called God. This God Family is identified not only as the Creator Family but also as the kingdom of God: "God IS that Kingdom."[2] In the resurrection every person who believes and obeys will become part of the God Family.

Jesus is accepted as the Son begotten by God but born again into the family of God at His resurrection. But He is also God, stated Armstrong: "He is very God, even as God, the Father, is God" and in exactly the same kind of relationship that Garner Ted has to the senior Armstrong.[3] In other words, Jesus is eternal God, but He is subordinate to the Father. Functionally, Armstrong reduced Jesus to a great Way-shower, or perfect Teacher, of what he called true Christianity.

While Armstrong claimed to be a conservative, Bible-believing Christian, he dismissed the Holy Spirit altogether as the third Person of a Trinity. For him, the Holy Spirit is not a Person but a force from God, bestowed upon the believer at baptism to help him receive the nature and power of Christ and to obey the commandments and laws of God. This spirit-force also gives a person the will to obey the spiritual law.

With similarities in many areas, it is in the doctrine of man that Armstrong approached most closely Mormon (LDS) theology. "The PURPOSE of life," he said, "is that in us God is really recreating *His own kind—reproducing Himself* . . . for we are, upon real conversion, actually *begotten* as sons (yet unborn) of God." At the resurrection we will be changed instantly into immortal beings and will be "born" of God. "WE SHALL THEN BE GOD!"[4] David Jon Hill, one of Armstrong's editors, spoke of that transition as the moment "when we become God as God is God, God as Jesus Christ is God."[5] Labeled a "central, vital Bible truth," this doctrine is not optional for Armstrongites.

Evangelicals who accept the Holy Spirit as one of the Persons of the Trinity believe that He indwells their lives at the time of their spiritual birth through commitment to Jesus Christ as their personal Savior. For Christians, salvation is a present reality (2 Tim. 1:8-9). Armstrong theology, on the other hand, teaches that we are "not yet saved"[6] and cannot be saved until the resurrection. Only then will God ever begin to save the majority of humankind.

In a study of Armstrong theology one seldom hears or reads that Christ can be an individual's personal Savior. Armstrong followers lack the priceless ingredient of New Testament Christian faith: a genuine, personal experience of Jesus. He coupled a reception of Jesus as a partial

The Plain Truth
J. BRUCE ADAMS

atonement for past sins with a day-by-day obedience to the laws of God. Therefore, a person cannot be sure of his salvation and stands in constant danger of losing the favor of God. Among other laws that must be kept is the observance of Saturday as the sabbath, a command Armstrong identified as a sign of the real Christian today and "the one on which YOUR VERY SALVATION and ETERNITY DEPENDS!"[7]

Armstrong ruled out salvation by grace. He followed Mormon and Jehovah's Witness teaching, requiring obedience to the teachings of Jesus and to the commandments. While he denied that his is a religion of works and insisted that eternal life is a free gift from God through Christ, he explained that this gift is conditioned on keeping the commandments. One wonders how the Armstrongites view Galatians, for in 2:15-21 the apostle Paul shakes the very foundation of the World Tomorrow system.

Another distinctive of the Armstrong belief, the view of afterlife, is much like that of the Adventists and Jehovah's Witnesses. Man is enveloped in a sort of soul sleep, without consciousness or a thought process. But the resurrection will bring a raising to life, a recreation, "not only of individuals, but also of entire nations."[8]

Furthermore, there are three resurrections, the first occurring at Christ's second coming, when the faithful will rise to new glory. One thousand years later a second resurrection will take place, called the resurrection of judgment. The dead who never had an opportunity for salvation will come at this time and will have an "opportunity to hear, accept, and live a life free from the burdens of a sinful society such as we now have."[9] In the third resurrection the persistently wicked will be annihilated in the "lake of fire." Thus, the Worldwide Church of God has eliminated a hell of torment. The worst that can happen to the vile and unrepentant is a quick death, interpreted as the "second death" of the Bible.

The British- or Anglo-Israelite theory, as it is now called, which captured Armstrong's imagination in the 1920s, has been developed by various persons since 1840. It contends that the Bible is mainly a history of the ancient Israelites. Britain is the lost tribe of Ephraim and the United States the lost tribe of Manasseh. Through a system of charts, the English-speaking people can trace their ancestry back to Adam. The throne of England descended directly from the throne of David.

Sound biblical scholars for the most part discredit this theory, questioning whether the ten tribes were completely lost. Passages in Ezra 6—8 state that the twelve tribes returned to Palestine and were represented at the dedication of the new Temple. If we accept reputable biblical scholarship, the Jews of today, not the British and American people, are the rightful descendants of the ancient Israelites. One danger in accepting the theory is the contention that only the English-speaking people can expect the best of God's blessings. For Christians, God's promise to Abraham (Gen. 12:1-3) was fulfilled in Christ (Gal. 3:8-9,29).

Armstrong rejected Easter, Christmas, and birthdays as pagan but kept the Jewish feasts. The Feast of Tabernacles in the fall is the major celebration, with thousands of members attending in numerous cities.

Personal Learning Activity 10

Under the topics "History" and "Teachings of the Church" write beside each paragraph a word or phrase giving the main thought.

Methods of Propagation

The Worldwide Church of God, claiming to be the one true church, is concerned about sending its "good news" to the world. To do so, it has capitalized on both verbal and written communication utilizing radio, television, and literature, as well as involvement at the education level.

From the one radio station in Eugene, Oregon, in 1934, Armstrong developed a religious network of radio and TV programs that are heard on over four hundred stations around the world and are broadcast at least 189 times each week in the United States and Canada.

Vying with this impressive coverage, numerous booklets and other printed pieces are produced and mailed free of charge. The best known of these materials are the magazines: the full-color, well-prepared *The Plain Truth* (also printed in French, Spanish, German, and Dutch), with a circulation of almost seven million in 1988, and *The Good News of the World Tomorrow,* claiming a circulation of around one million. A magazine for youth is also produced. Free copies are distributed at well-traveled locations such as airport concourses and grocery stores.

Personal Learning Activity 11

How does the Worldwide Church of God propagate its teachings?

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Witnessing to Armstrongites

The following are suggestions for sharing Christ's message with members of the Armstrong group.

- Using a good concordance, find biblical passages that counter the teachings of the Worldwide Church of God. The passages teaching that salvation is a free gift of God should be memorized.
- The Armstrongite may be confused as to why he was formerly a member of a mainline Protestant denomination. Ask questions to determine his level of commitment and understanding.
- Let him see your genuine concern and Christian love in action.
- Suggest a study of one of the books of the New Testament. For the

Armstrong follower, Galatians is a good example.

- Suggest that the person study selected Bible passages on the great doctrines and issues. The pamphlet *The Baptist Faith and Message,* a good compilation of Bible references, may be secured from Baptist associational offices and local churches.
- Invite the person to attend your church's worship service. The openness and freedom in Bible study and the celebrative joy of the worship may impress him.
- Ask the person to tell you why he is now interested in the Armstrong system. Does he feel that one man or a small group of interpreters has all the answers to basic questions of religion and life? When this small group of interpreters passes off the scene, will other leaders be as successful as they were?
- Give a current testimony on why Jesus is the ever-present answer to your spiritual needs and quest. Stress the presence and power of the Holy Spirit in your life. Remember that the Armstrong follower, as well as a person of other sects and cults, usually has a difficult time giving a personal testimony of Jesus Christ as Lord of his life. He has substituted a system based on the authoritative pronouncements of an individual for the indwelling presence of a living Lord.
- Point out that a wholesome Christian is also a good neighbor, a citizen interested in community betterment. Although our society is troubled with evildoers, we try to bring Christian love and action to help people see and attain a better community. The Armstrongs and some other sectarians have written off our present society as almost hopeless.
- Pray earnestly that you will be a true representative of the gospel of good news. Call for a decision as the Holy Spirit leads you.

Personal Learning Activity 12

What would you say to a member of the Worldwide Church of God if he tried to get you to join his cult? What statements could you make to affirm your Christian faith?

Notes

1. Roger F. Campbell, *Herbert W. Armstrong and His Worldwide Church of God* (Fort Washington, PA: Christian Literature Crusade, Inc., 1974), p. 15.
2. Herbert W. Armstrong, *Why Marriage! Soon Obsolete?* p. 22.
3. Ibid., p. 20.
4. Herbert W. Armstrong, *Why Were You Born?* p. 26.
5. *Tomorrow's World,* September-October 1970, p. 28.
6. Herbert W. Armstrong, *What Do You Mean . . . SALVATION?* p. 19.
7. Herbert W. Armstrong, *Which Day Is the Christian Sabbath?* p. 58.
8. *The Plain Truth,* May 1973, pp. 34 ff.
9. Ibid., p. 36.

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CHAPTER 5

The Unification Church of Sun Myung Moon

James N. Lewis, Jr.

Perhaps no new religious group has caught the attention of the American public as has the Unification Church of Sun Myung Moon. National tours, street-corner solicitation, government investigations, charges of brainwashing, and deprogramming of Unification Church members have made headlines.

Thousands of American youth were attracted by and joined the Unification Church during the 1970s. Most later became disillusioned and left or were deprogrammed. In the late 1980s most of the estimated five to seven thousand core members in the United States are foreign-born, most notably from Japan and Korea.

What has attracted thousands of young people to follow a Korean-born "messiah"? What are the beliefs of this group?

A Brief History

Sun Myung Moon (Sun Shining Moon) was born Yong Myung Moon (Dragon Shining Moon) on January 6, 1920. On Easter 1936 Jesus supposedly appeared to him in a manner similar to that experienced by Joseph Smith, Jr., the founder of Mormonism. In this encounter Jesus allegedly called Moon to complete the mission that the unbelieving people of Jesus' day had aborted by crucifying Him. Over the next ten years Moon received additional "revelations" that became the essence of the holy book of the Unification Church, *Divine Principle*.

Moon was in prison in Korea from 1948 to 1950. Church members claim that this was for his anti-Communist stance and tell stories of legendary dimensions regarding his suffering. Other sources make quite different allegations concerning sexual misconduct.

The Holy Spirit Association for the Unification of World Christianity, the official name for Moon's organization, was founded in 1954 in Korea.

In 1960 Moon married Hak-Ja Han in what followers consider the "marriage of the Lamb," a sign of messiahship in *Divine Principle*. Although Moon had been married previously, in this latter marriage the two "perfect" persons were united, and the movement toward a perfect world, the kingdom of heaven and earth, began.

With the move to the United States in 1972, Moon's strategy moved closer to fulfillment. According to *Divine Principle,* God's plan was for Moon to have major strength in three non-Communist nations. These he interprets to be Korea, Japan, and the United States.

Moon has courted American politicians in his worldwide strategy. In Washington Moonies sought to influence members of Congress. By stressing opposition to Communism, advocating world peace, and promoting Christian unity, Moon's organization elicited endorsements from diverse statesmen, including members of Congress and senators.

Unification Church publications frequently carry pictures of Sun Myung Moon posing with past and present government and religious leaders. Such pictures and letters imply support, although those involved possibly have no awareness of Moon's full doctrinal or political ideologies.

To sway government policy is one intention of Moon "front" organizations, such as the Freedom Leadership Foundation. Pro-Nixon demonstrations in 1974, annual tours around the United States, and bicentennial promotions in 1976 drew nationwide attention to Moon's message on America and its role in God's divine plan. Moon's anti-Communist teachings through his CAUSA organization and free trips to exotic places around the world have attracted many religious leaders, scientists, and media personnel. The Unification Church publishes daily newspapers in New York City and Washington, DC.

Promoting peace, unity, and patriotism, Moon has recruited members from many elements of society. Members of the counterculture backlash; disenchanted "straight" youth; and hard-working, middle-class students alike became part of the movement. Adherents to his discipline apparently want firm, unequivocable answers, regimentation, a sense of

community, and a cause with global scope. The Moonies are usually clean-cut, energetic, and aggressive, with most of the national leaders in their late twenties to early thirties.

Recruitment focuses on college-age youth through the Collegiate Association for the Research of Principles or CARP program. Communal members make up the core "signed family" members of the church; however, there are two other classes: signed nonfamily and supporters. The signed family members make the Moon organization a financial success.

Using hundreds of thousands of volunteer hours, Moon has been able to garner enough funds through parking-lot solicitation and flower selling to purchase two lavish pieces of real estate in New York state, a hotel and other buildings in midtown Manhattan, numerous local headquarters, and other property across the United States.

Serious doubt must be raised about the orthodoxy of the Unification Church, as this discussion of doctrine will indicate. In addition, its spread throughout the United States, in both metropolitan and urban areas, as well as the legal-religion status accorded by some campuses, causes considerable concern. Well-informed Christians must be aware of the teachings and dangers of such pseudo-Christian movements.

Personal Learning Activity 13

Identify the following.

1. Sun Myung Moon _____

2. *Divine Principle* _____

3. Signed family members _____

Unification Doctrine

After founding the Holy Spirit Association for the Unification of World Christianity in 1954, Moon began to formalize his doctrine. Some see a substantial influence of the self-professed Korean messiah Paik Moon Kim, under whom Moon studied for six months. Yoo Hyo Won, a follower of Moon, wrote down his theological revelations, and they were printed as *Divine Principle* in 1957.

According to Unification Church spokesman W. Farley Jones, we are living in the Completed Testament Age, an age in which Unification theology has replaced Christianity. The "new truth," which is made known through *Divine Principle,* enables man to understand the Bible, which was given as a textbook of truth for a "people whose spiritual and intellectual standard was very low, compared to that of today."[1] "The Bible, however, is not the truth itself, but a textbook teaching the truth. . . . Therefore, we must not regard the textbook as absolute in every detail."[2]

This "new truth" that *Divine Principle* purports to provide will "present the internal truth that religion has pursued and the external truth searched for by science under one unified theme."[3] With such a purpose *Divine Principle* develops a dualistic, pseudo-scientific, quasi-Christian exposition of a history of salvation. With *Divine Principle* humankind is provided with a system by which to understand Scripture that was formerly unknown.

Moon's system largely ignores the cultural and historical context of Scripture. Inconsistency is the key to his biblical interpretation. While speaking of the symbology of the Bible, he bases primary elements of his teaching on its literal interpretation.

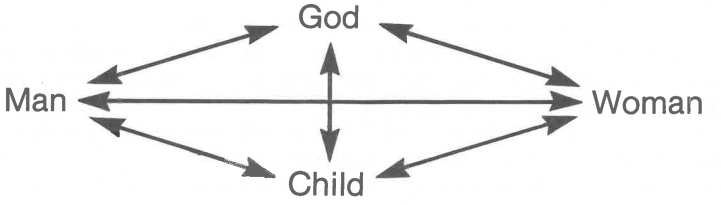
Unification thought is fundamentally a blending of Moon's electrical-engineering background, Oriental dualistic philosophies, Korean messianism, numerology, and a theory of restoration.

Beginning with creation, *Divine Principle* forces all of history into its system. God's intention was to create beings with whom He could commune and who would establish His kingdom on earth in a perfect, obedient world. According to *Divine Principle,* creation established the possibility for a cosmic dualism with identical physical and spiritual realms. Such a dualism is not biblical.

The First Adam

After Eve's disobedience by an illicit sexual relationship with Satan, the perfect world was distorted. Adam then was contaminated by his premature sexual relationship with Eve. Eve's sin caused the spiritual fall; Adam's sin caused the physical fall of humankind. Adam's sin compounded the problem, for according to *Divine Principle,* Adam and Eve should have become centered on God. God, Adam, and Eve would have formed the Trinity had they done as God willed.

For Moonism, the perfect family (God-Man-Woman-Children) is the ideal of creation. Had Adam and Eve, as perfect people, centered their lives on God through give-and-take action, they would have had perfect children who would have likewise centered on God, establishing the essential Four-Position Foundation. Such centering on God is possible individually and corporately. "The man whose mind and body have formed a four position foundation of the original God-centered nature becomes God's temple (1 Cor. 3:16) and forms one body with Him (John 14:20). This means that man attains deity."[4]



Four-Position Foundation

The Second Adam—Jesus

Significant biblical figures had the occasion to restore humankind but failed. When the time was right, by Moon's calculations, Jesus came with the supreme opportunity for the reversal of humankind's plight. As the Second Adam, Jesus had only to marry and have children in order to fulfill God's will. Jesus was rejected because He did not meet the Jewish expectations of the coming Messiah. Since He was killed before He married, Jesus failed in His mission.[5] The crucifixion was not in God's plan, and it did not achieve full salvation for man. Only when Jesus' rejection was obvious did God activate an auxiliary plan to accomplish partial salvation through the imminent crucifixion. Jesus was informed of this at the mount of transfiguration (Luke 9:31). Jesus' death achieved only spiritual salvation through ransom; it did not achieve physical salvation and the kingdom of heaven on earth. For this reason, Moon reveals, a Third Adam must come.

When asked about scriptural support for such views, Moonies offer aberrant interpretations. Drawing upon the nonbiblical idea of dual realms, Moon allows spiritual perfection without an accompanying physical perfection. Thus, man still sins; that is, man is still imperfect in the physical realm. Biblical admonitions to "be perfect" and Paul's inward struggle (Rom. 7:22-25) are ample evidence to Moon of man's essential duality. Likewise, sayings related to the Son of man (Luke 17:25-30) are relegated to a Third Adam, not Jesus. A leader in the Unification Church reasoned in a personal letter that if salvation were complete, then we would no more need a Savior, in whatever form He may come, but that all Christians await a second coming.

Resurrection, for Moon, is not a phenomenon restricted to Jesus and the end time. It is part of man's restoration process from "the state of having fallen under Satanic dominion, back to the direct dominion of God. Accordingly, when we repent of our sins, making ourselves better and better, day by day, we are coming closer to resurrection."[6]

This restoration process is essential to Moon's system. Restoration through indemnity requires the reversal of all history. Accordingly, each failure to center on God must be reversed. In offering biblical support for indemnity, a church spokesman offered Matthew 5:23-26 as the main support. He explained that although this passage does not explicitly refer to the idea of reversal, it does imply the need to right the wrong to one's brother and also hints of the need to pay a price for wrong. Christians cannot regard such groundless interpretation as the basis for any system of salvation.

Some persons, for reasons of genealogy, numerology, or place in time, are able to restore more of history than others. The persons who fill Adam's position can restore all of history to God if they accomplish His will.

The Third Adam—Moon?

Through a numerological calculation called time identity, which runs an approximate two-thousand-year cycle, the occasion for the coming of the

Third Adam, the Lord of the Second Advent, was to occur about 1920, Moon's birth year. Since the Lord of the Second Advent had only one task, physical salvation through marriage to the perfect Second Eve, his mission conceivably will be easily fulfilled. Indeed, Moon's followers believe that this event, identified as the marriage of the Lamb from Revelation, occurred when Moon married Hak-Ja Han in 1960. This marriage was prophesied in *Divine Principle*. Although no explicit written source within the Unification Church calls Moon the Lord of the Second Advent, many of his followers do.

In fact, the allusions in *Divine Principle* to the "Preparation Period for the Second Advent of the Messiah" and the "Second Advent"[7] leave little doubt as to whom the veiled references refer. The Lord of the Second Advent must be a man, born in Korea, on the front line in the fight against Communism (the last great enemy of God), who has made significant impact on at least three societies. By design, Unification Church officials contend, America is the third (a perfect number) such country after Korea and Japan. In his own messages Moon calls America to fulfill its destiny in finalizing God's restoration process.

Moon teaches that marriage is essential for physical salvation, while spiritual salvation is received through faith in Christ. His mass marriages of thousands of couples have been well publicized.

The doctrine of the Unification Church cannot be called Christian. By denying the fullness of salvation in Jesus Christ, the heart has been cut from the gospel. Capricious interpretation and systematization of the Scripture erode any further claims to orthodox Christian belief.

Personal Learning Activity 14

List and explain at least three Unification doctrines.

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Controversies

Since spreading to the United States in 1972, the Unification Church has been the object of numerous controversies. Many Christian groups have picketed Moon's rallies. The Council of Churches of New York City has denied membership to the Unification Church. The courts have threatened to deport foreign followers who have violated their visas. Moon served a fourteen-month sentence for federal-income-tax evasion in 1984-85.

New converts are subjected to long and intensive orientation processes. Moon and his group have been under much attack for breaking up

families and brainwashing adherents. Numerous groups have arisen opposing Moon, some bringing suit against his organization and seeking the return of followers. Some parents have used deprogrammers to restore their children to the family. The practice of deprogramming members of the Unification Church has decreased as fewer American youth have joined the group in the 1980s.

Witnessing to Unification Church Members

1. There is no best method to witness to a member of the Unification Church.
2. The right attitude, of course, is essential; but a knowledge of the essential Christian doctrines, what the Bible says, and how to use the Bible in a witnessing encounter are also essential.
3. The Unification Church member is always quick to share his personal testimony about his church. Your personal testimony of a relationship with Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior may be most effective in a witnessing encounter. The Unification Church member should clearly understand that your faith in Christ is a living and dynamic relationship.
4. *Divine Principle* says, "Many passages in the Bible say that new words of truth will be given to mankind in the 'Last Days.'"[8] However, it gives no supporting biblical texts for this statement. The Christian may begin at this point with remarks such as: "What is truth? Finding truth is a worthy goal, since the truth shall make you free" (John 8:32). In continuing the witnessing encounter, you should emphasize that truth ultimately rests in a person, Jesus Christ, who proclaimed, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father, but through Me" (John 14:6).[9]

   If Christ is the truth, it follows that what He said and taught can and must be accepted as the truth. He is quoted as saying, "Truly, I say to you" more than one hundred times in the Gospels. A person must conclude that, unless Jesus was a liar and a deceiver—and we know He was not since He "committed no sin, nor was any deceit found in His mouth" (1 Pet. 2:22, NASB)—we can accept what Jesus said about Himself and His mission.
5. Since Moon teaches that he is the Lord of the Second Advent, he must discredit Jesus' work as Lord and Savior. Moon says that Jesus was a man who perfectly realized His mission and became like God. Moon borrows this idea from the Buddhist teaching that anyone who achieves enlightenment becomes Buddha.

   The Christian response is that Jesus is Immanuel or God with us (Matt. 1:23). Although Jesus did not explicitly call Himself God, His words and works clearly attest to that fact. He allowed people to worship Him. Jesus and His disciples made divine claims about who He was (John 1:1-3,14; 5:17-18; 10:25-39); exercised divine works (Mark 2:5-12); and exerted authority over nature (Mark 4:35-41). Jesus possessed the moral attributes of God: holiness (Luke 1:35; Rev. 3:7); truth (John 14:6); and righteousness (2 Tim. 4:8).

6. Moon further discredits the uniqueness of Christ by denying the virgin birth. The Christian response is that the doctrine of the virgin birth, based on Matthew 1:18-25 and Luke 1—2, is the belief that Jesus was miraculously conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of a virgin mother. The Scriptures substantiate the miracle: After the betrothal and before Mary and Joseph had sexual relations, she was found to be with child "of the Holy Spirit" (Matt. 1:18-20). Christians see the virgin birth as a fulfillment of the prophecy in Isaiah 7:14. The fact that Zechariah was "righteous in the sight of God" (Luke 1:6) would clearly rule out an adulterous affair with Mary, as Moon claims.
7. Moon again discredits the person and work of Christ by teaching that Jesus was unable to complete His mission as Savior of humankind. According to Moon, Jesus was supposed to have found a perfect wife to establish God's perfect family on earth to provide both the spiritual and the physical salvation of humankind. However, John the Baptist failed in his mission to prepare the Jews for Jesus' message. Because of the crucifixion, Jesus can provide only the spiritual salvation of humankind; the Lord of the Second Advent must provide physical salvation by doing what Jesus was unable to accomplish.

   The Christian can cite many biblical passages that affirm that Jesus' death on the cross accomplished humankind's full salvation. The artificial division between spiritual and physical sin and salvation is unbiblical. Jesus "desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. For there is one God, and one mediator also between God and men, . . . who gave Himself as a ransom for all" (1 Tim. 2:4-6, NASB). John wrote that Jesus' blood "cleanses us from all sin" (1 John 1:7, NASB) and that "the Father has sent the Son to be the Savior of the world" (1 John 4:14, NASB).
8. Seek to lead the member of the Unification Church to see that—
   a. he is a sinner (John 3:18; Rom. 3:23; 6:23);
   b. he cannot save himself (Acts 4:12; Eph. 2:8-10);
   c. he will perish without Christ (John 3:16,36);
   d. he can be saved now (John 1:12; Acts 16:31; Rom. 10:9);
   e. he must be a consistent, fruitful Christian after conversion (2 Tim. 2:15; Heb. 10:25).
9. Give the member of the Unification Church an opportunity to accept Jesus Christ as his Lord and Savior.

Personal Learning Activity 15

An attractive young woman approaches you and asks for money for a charity you have never heard of. You suspect that she is a Moonie. What would you say to her as a witness of your faith in Christ?

Notes

1. *Divine Principle* (New York: The Holy Spirit Association for the Unification of World Christianity, 1973), p. 131.

2. Ibid., p. 9.
3. Ibid., p. 10.
4. Ibid., p. 43.
5. Ibid., pp. 140-47.
6. Ibid., p. 170.
7. Ibid., pp. 449-536.
8. Ibid., p. 10.
9. From the *New American Standard Bible*. Copyright © The Lockman Foundation, 1960, 1962, 1963, 1968, 1971, 1972, 1973, 1975, 1977. Used by permission. Subsequent quotations are marked NASB.

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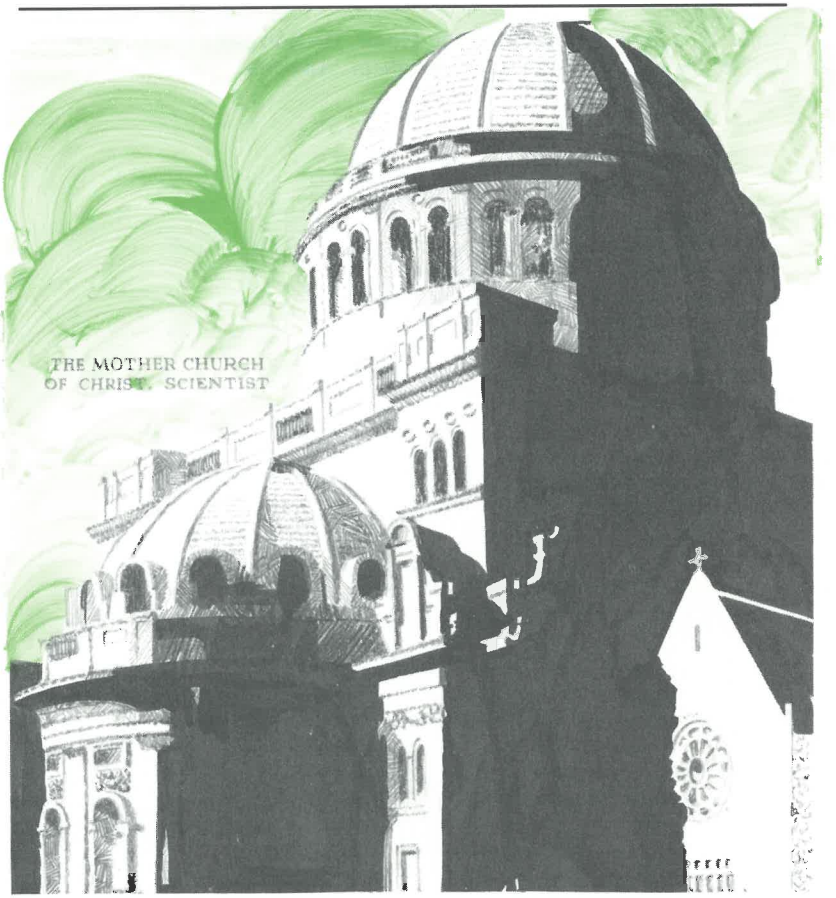
CHAPTER 6

Christian Scientists and the Baptist Witness

M. Thomas Starkes



An exclusive magazine once carried a full-page ad urging readers to purchase a copy of the main textbook of Christian Science, Mary Baker G. Eddy's *Science and Health with Key to the Scriptures*. The ad presents the book as offering "an entirely fresh look at the teaching of Christ Jesus" and revealing "the true spiritual significance" of the Bible's content.[1]

Such concerted effort to make its thought known has caused the Christian Science movement to grow from fewer than fifty thousand to over six hundred thousand adherents worldwide. Most evangelical Christians have been confronted either by such mass communication or by personal testimonies of the power of Christian Science. This chapter will inform you of the history, doctrines, nature, and weaknesses of the Christian Science movement. This is done with Mrs. Eddy's own words well in mind: "The opponents of divine Science must be charitable, if they would be Christian."[2] However, a charitable attitude does not erase the Christian's responsibility to proclaim the healing forgiveness of sin, made possible by a reliance on God's way of deliverance—His resurrected Son.

A History of Christian Science

The history of Christian Science is inseparable from the career of Mary Baker G. Eddy, who was born to Congregationalist parents in 1821 in Bow, New Hampshire. Her childhood was partially spoiled by her frequent illnesses. At age twenty-two she married George Glover. His unfortunate death only seven months later left his pregnant wife alone to bear George, Jr. Nine years later Mrs. Glover married a dentist, Dr. Daniel Patterson. Their marriage ended in divorce several months after he abandoned her in 1866. Her third marriage was in 1877 to Asa Eddy, the first of her pupils to announce publicly that he was a Christian Science practitioner. Mr. Eddy's death in 1882 came as a harsh blow to his devoted wife, who charged in local newspapers that he had been killed by arsenic that was "mentally administered."

The degree of Mrs. Eddy's reliance on Dr. Phineas Quimby (generally regarded as the founder of New Thought) for her ideas remains a subject of lively debate. The outline of her contacts with him is clear. As Mrs. Patterson, she first went to be treated by Quimby in October of 1862 in Portland, Maine, and was impressed with his contention that the Bible contained a hidden science to solve life's problems. She stayed a few weeks to aid Dr. Quimby in treating his patients. She later denied any reliance on Quimby for her ideas on the science of healing; but Horatio W. Dresser published a work that contained correspondence between her and Quimby, which verified her dependence on him.[3]

Quimby died in January 1866. An event the following month was regarded by Mrs. Eddy to be the turning point in her life. She fell on an icy pavement and spent three pain-filled days in her bed until she was healed as she read Matthew 9:2-8, the story of Jesus' healing of the paralytic. She vowed to spend the rest of her life emphasizing the healing power in religion. The next nine years were filled with intense study.

A major milestone in the Christian Science movement came with the publication of *Science and Health with Key to the Scriptures* in 1875. Mrs. Eddy's thoughts had thus solidified in printed form, and her following grew rapidly. In 1879 a charter was obtained for the Church of Christ, Scientist, to be organized in Boston, and Mrs. Eddy accepted the call to become the pastor. Two years later the training of Christian Scientists was started at Massachusetts Metaphysical College. The publication of *The*

Christian Science Journal was started in 1883. The next year Mrs. Eddy went to Chicago to give a series of lectures to her followers there, evidence that the movement was spreading. In 1886 the National Christian Scientist Association was organized.

Mrs. Eddy retired from local leadership in 1889 and moved to Concord, New Hampshire. Five years later the First Church of Christ, Scientist, was built at a cost of a quarter million dollars in Boston. This church has since been referred to as the Mother Church. By this time over five thousand members of the movement were located in thirty-seven states. In 1908 Mrs. Eddy founded *The Christian Science Monitor,* a daily newspaper that emphasizes what is "right with the people in the news."

Since Mrs. Eddy's death in 1910, no other person has served as pastor of the Mother Church. The movement continues to rely heavily on her influence and writings and is led by a board of directors, which was declared in 1921 by the Supreme Judicial Court of Massachusetts to be the final authority in the Christian Science Church.

The future of Christian Science is difficult to predict. Although membership figures are not released, it is believed that the membership in the United States peaked in the 1960s at 350,000. Membership has declined to 200,000, and nearly five hundred church branches have closed since then. The circulation of *The Christian Science Monitor* dropped from 218,886 in 1970 to 186,195 in 1988.

Personal Learning Activity 16

Outline the history of the Christian Science movement.

A Question of Revelation

Most Christian Scientists would assert that Mrs. Eddy's teachings came through direct revelation from God to their leader. Other students of American intellectual history of a century ago might point to a general climate of thought in her day that influenced her directly. Not the least of these influences was that of New Thought, which relied heavily on emphasizing the spiritual aspects of life as opposed to the "evil" material world. Man was thought to be basically divine by leading philosophers of the day such as Ralph Waldo Emerson. Some elements of Hindu philosophy were prevalent in Mrs. Eddy's day, such as the unimportance of matter and the emphasis on the "one reality."

Mrs. Eddy was largely self-educated and could hardly have bypassed the intellectual currents of her day. She recorded that in her youth her favorite studies were "'natural philosophy, logic, and moral science.'"[4] So it appears to most outside students of the Christian Science tradition that her readings, coupled with an imaginative mind, were factors in Mrs. Eddy's development of thought.

Mrs. Eddy was aware that she lived in a time of intellectual ferment. She wrote in the preface to *Science and Health:* "The time for thinkers

has come. Truth, independent of doctrines and time-honored systems, knocks at the portal of humanity."[5] Although she knew her ideas were new to most Christians, Mrs. Eddy at least tried to tie her teachings to the Bible. She wrote, "Divine Science derives its sanction from the Bible."[6] Yet she contended that God's revelation to her was more final than the Bible itself: "God had been graciously preparing me during many years for the reception of this final revelation of the absolute divine Principle of scientific mental healing."[7] Furthermore, the founder of Christian Science called for a more "advanced" way to read the Bible: "The literal rendering of the Scriptures makes them nothing valuable, but often is the foundation of unbelief and hopelessness. The metaphysical rendering is health and peace and hope for all."[8]

Even more important is the question of how modern Christian Scientists view the revelation to their leader. Mrs. Eddy's followers believe that "the Revelation of Divine Science was a divine revelation to Mrs. Eddy. . . . The divine revelation took the form of *Science and Health with Key to the Scriptures*."[9] Mrs. Eddy herself considered her revelation to be of divine significance: "The second appearing of Jesus is, unquestionably, the spiritual advent of the advancing idea of God, as in Christian Science."[10]

Most Christian Scientists today regard their founder as the supreme and final revelator. The church she founded is careful to protect her memory from unfavorable publicity. Mainstream Christians regard as heretical this tendency to canonize Mrs. Eddy's writings and to idealize her person, as they do any attempt to supplement the Scriptures with disclosure of "hidden" meaning. This tendency is also heretical, especially when it replaces classical Christian statements of the nature of man and God with metaphysical interpretations.

Christian Science Doctrines

The most important question in doctrine, for most Christians, relates to salvation. Mrs. Eddy defined *salvation* as "Life, Truth, and Love understood and demonstrated as supreme over all; sin, sickness, and death destroyed."[11] She was dogmatic about the manner of salvation: " There is but one way to heaven, harmony, and Christ in divine Science shows us this way. It is to know no other reality . . . than good, God and His reflection."[12] For Christian Science, salvation means deliverance from any awareness of evil or pain and the enjoyment of only the wholesome elements of life.

In Christian Science thought, sin is error and is to be conquered by denying its power or existence. The death of Christ makes little or no difference in the matter of individual salvation, according to Mrs. Eddy. She wrote, "Man as God's idea is already saved with an everlasting salvation."[13] Most Christians can hardly recognize the doctrine of God as taught by Christian Science. The founder of the latter movement wrote to her followers: "Life, Truth, and Love constitute the triune Person called God, . . . God the Father-Mother; Christ the spiritual idea of sonship; divine Science or the Holy Comforter."[14] God is in no sense a person but a principle.

The most serious cleavage between Christian Science thought and classic Christian statements of faith comes at the point of the person and nature of Jesus Christ. The Christian Science textbook states clearly: "A portion of God could not enter man; neither could God's fulness be reflected by a single man."[15] The historical Jesus and the Christ-event are not used in Christian Science as synonyms. Jesus was not divine, but only the Christ principle in Him was true deity. Jesus is merely the name of the man who presented this principle better than anyone else. He was supposedly endowed with the divine "Christ-spirit" without measure. This doctrine, in the final analysis, denies the necessity for the incarnation of God, the sinlessness of Jesus, and His deity. Christian Science does not stress Jesus' physical resurrection. Mrs. Eddy denied that Jesus ever died. She wrote, "Jesus' students . . . did not perform many wonderful works, until they saw him after his crucifixion and learned that he had not died."[16]

The chief postulates of the Christian Science faith may be summarized as follows: Life is good; spirit cannot be limited to matter; life is not subject to death or evil; and the really spiritual person has no material life or death.

Personal Learning Activity 17

How is the Christian Science concept of Christ different from the Christian concept?

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The Bible Speaks

Certain similarities exist between Christian Science thought and classical Christian statements of faith. Both agree that God is all-powerful as the Creator and is good. Both assert that while Jesus was on earth He healed multiple types of diseases. However, the differences in beliefs far outweigh the similarities.

Mrs. Eddy denied the biblical doctrine of the Trinity, saying that the trinity is "Life, Truth, and Love."[17]

She sometimes spoke of God in impersonal terms such as *Truth* and *Mind*. She gave a pantheistic definition of God: "God is All-in-all."[18] At other times, she spoke of God as "Father-Mother."[19]

Mrs. Eddy distinguished between Jesus the man and Christ as an idea or concept that rested upon Him. She also rejected His physical resurrection.

Another key difference is the view and the use of Scripture. Mrs. Eddy said in a sermon, "The material record of the Bible . . . is no more important to our well-being than the history of Europe and America."[20] Protestant Christians rely heavily on Scripture for their doctrines. Christian Scientists give little thought to the method of biblical interpretation and prefer to have the "hidden" meaning in the Bible speak to them. A significant example of this rather naive use of Scripture is seen in Mrs. Eddy's "proof" that the Holy Spirit is really divine science: "In the words of St. John: 'He shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you *forever*.' This Comforter I understand to be Divine Science."[21] The Bible, she said, has thousands of errors, with three hundred thousand mistakes in the New Testament alone.

Another divergence is evident in the matter of man's relationship to evil or negative realities, that is, sin, illness, and death. Mrs. Eddy put her thought simply: "Man is incapable of sin, sickness, and death."[22] The biblical view of man's sin is stated just as clearly: "If we say that we have not sinned, we make a liar out of God, and his word is not in us" (1 John 1:10, GNB). The Bible also speaks of death in unmistakable terms: "Sin came into the world through one man, and his sin brought death with it. As a result, death spread to the whole human race" (Rom. 5:12, GNB).

Christian Science refuses to admit the reality of sickness in the human order. Salvation comes when a person stops believing in the illusion of sin, sickness, and death. Mrs. Eddy wrote, "Sin, disease, and death have no foundations in Truth."[23] In other contexts, Christian Scientists are taught that man is never sick and that no nervous breakdowns or dislocations can really occur. Matthew 11, as spoken by Jesus, records a different view of disease: "Go and show John again those things which you do hear and see: the blind receive their sight, and the lame walk . . . and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up" (vv. 4-5). As one can readily see, Scripture, when kept free from a selective metaphysical meaning, speaks clearly on the matters of man and the negative realities he must face.

Christian Science Worship

Christian Science worship services would likely prove strange to the newcomer. Generally, no sermon is preached. Prescribed portions of Scripture, read by a person called the second reader, are interspersed with readings of interpretative passages from *Science and Health* by the first reader. Some hymns are sung, and a period of silent prayer is observed. This is followed by a recitation of Christ's Model Prayer, and a "spiritual" version of it is repeated alternately. The following excerpt is a sample: "And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors (and Truth will destroy the claims of error)."

The Wednesday-night services are confined primarily to testimonies of persons who have been "healed" through divine science.

No ordinances are observed in any structured sense in Christian Science services. *Science and Health* contains Mrs. Eddy's "spiritual" interpretations of baptism and the Lord's Supper: "Our baptism is a purification from all error. . . . Our Eucharist is spiritual communion with the one God. Our bread . . . is Truth. Our cup is the cross. Our wine the inspiration of Love."[24]

The local meetings of instruction are kept under control by the Mother Church and its board of trustees. Lectureships are scheduled once a year in each branch church. Every lecture is read and approved by the clerk of the Mother Church before it can be delivered.

One may join a Christian Science church only after he has sworn that he has severed his relationship with any church of which he has ever been a member. He must also accept the formal teachings of the Mother Church and read "understandingly" the textbook and all other books by Mrs. Eddy.

The officers of the local organization include the first and second readers, whose responsibilities are mainly in the leading of worship; those in charge of the reading room, where Christian Science literature may be read, borrowed, or purchased; and the practitioners, who devote their full time to the practice of their healing methods.

Social Concern

Christian Science has as its ultimate goal the making of individuals who have found peace within. Pursuing this goal does not lend itself to collec-

tive social action. Another factor that hinders the development of social concern is that, since evil and sin are regarded as but illusions, a sure sign of a lack of faith is to become overly concerned about them. Christian Scientists have shown very little interest in building educational institutions except those that specifically teach their system of thought. Unlike most cults, Christian Scientists do not sponsor a structured foreign-missionary effort. Even when *Science and Health* is translated into a foreign language, the English text goes alongside it on the same page. No one can become an instructor in Christian Science thought unless he is a "thorough English scholar."

The dominant factor in enlisting new adult converts for Christian Science is the healing ministry. Every issue of *Christian Science Sentinel* and *The Christian Science Journal* contains testimonies of healing. One issue of the latter contained a letter in which a woman claims to have seen Christian Science heal members of her family of cancer, Bright's disease, asthma, pneumonia, and kidney infection.[25] Like most of the mind cults, Christian Science stresses the removal of disease by thinking pure thoughts. This is aided by reading *Science and Health* or consulting a practitioner. The practitioner instructs the patient in how to overcome his illness by refusing to think of it.

Christian Science undoubtedly performs a service to society by ministering to many who are emotionally disturbed and whose diseases are induced by suggestion. However, medical documentation of the cures is rare since verification comes almost totally from within Christian Science circles. On numerous occasions national attention has focused on the controversy between Christian Science practitioners and the medical profession. Christian Science practitioners have won the right to practice legally in most states, despite repeated protests from medical doctors, and continue to practice healing on those who desire their type of assistance.

What They Can Teach Us

First, the fact that Christian Science grows primarily on the basis of the healing of the mind is due partially to the fact that other religious groups fail to offer full programs of direct and referral counseling. Jesus' pattern of healing revealed His interest in the complete personality. He was as concerned for the demoniac from Gadara as for the blind Bartimaeus. To follow seriously in the footsteps of the Master will necessitate for Baptists an increased emphasis on the training of pastors as counselors; the utilization of community resources for the mentally ill and disturbed; and the genuine, active concern of the Christian community for those sometimes forced to turn in desperation to Christian Science.

A second lesson others can learn from Christian Science is the power of the written word. Its daily newspaper, *The Christian Science Monitor,* has received numerous Pulitzer prizes for reporting, and it projects to the public an image of intellectual integrity for the whole movement. Christian Science reading rooms are noticeable in every major metropolitan area, a witnessing approach that others might well emulate.

A third lesson comes in the form of a warning—against the careless misuse of Scripture. Such a glaring failure on the part of Christian Science to give due consideration to the literal rendering of the message of the Bible should underline for others the importance of biblical interpretation. A course on the interpretation of Scripture should be taught yearly in churches interested in having their people know how to read the textbook of their faith. Bernard Ramm's *Protestant Biblical Interpretation* might be helpful in this course. If this had been done earlier, secondary textbooks such as *Science and Health* might never have appealed to former Protestants who are now members of the Christian Science movement.

How to Witness to a Christian Scientist

Christians have good news for the person caught in this hopeless situation. Christians believe in and have received salvation from sin and death by grace through faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior (Eph. 2:8-10). Nothing, not even death, can separate the Christian from the love of Christ (Rom. 8:35-39). Christ desires that every person accept His free gift of eternal life (Rom. 6:23). Christians testify of the joy (John 15:11) and the abundant life (John 10:10) they have found because of their faith in Christ.

Any effort to witness to the Christian Scientist must be supported by the twin powers of prayer and the Holy Spirit. A basic knowledge of Christian Science history and doctrines is also mandatory. The Christian Scientist should be aware that the interest is in him as a person, not merely as a prospect. This may require months of cultivation evangelism in which he is able to observe, in the Christians he sees, a sense of peace that comes by acknowledging (not denying or ignoring) one's disharmony with God.

Frank discussion of the nature of biblical authority should be interspersed with the mutual study of Scripture, with special emphasis on passages dealing with the nature of man, sin, death, and the resurrection. This is not to be confused with the prooftext method of reading to the prospect favorite verses but should be an open-minded examination together of the biblical witness.

If Christian Scientists with whom one works can see sincere, Christlike concern in the witness's faith, peace of mind in the forgiveness of sin, and an open-minded searching of the Scripture, he may be led to search for that same faith and be further led by the Holy Spirit to rest his life on the Christ of faith.

Personal Learning Activity 18

Write down some key points you could make in witnessing to a Christian Scientist that would help him/her to do some serious thinking about the Christian faith.

Notes

1. *Saturday Review,* January 13, 1968, p. 86.
2. Mary Baker Eddy, *Science and Health with Key to the Scriptures* (Boston: The trustees under the will of Mary Baker G. Eddy, 1875), p. 354.
3. See Horatio W. Dresser, *The Quimby Manuscripts* (New York: T. Y. Crowell, 1921).
4. Charles S. Braden, *Christian Science Today: Power, Policy, Practice* (Dallas: Southern Methodist University Press, 1958), p. 31.
5. Eddy, p. vii.
6. Ibid., p. 146.
7. Ibid., p. 107.
8. Mary Baker Eddy, *Miscellaneous Writings 1883-1896* (Boston: Allison V. Stewart, 1896), p. 169.
9. William L. Hendricks, "The Cults" (Syllabus, Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1963), p. 57.
10. Mary Baker Eddy, *Retrospection and Introspection* (Boston: The First Church of Christ, Scientist, 1920), p. 70.
11. Eddy, *Science and Health,* p. 593.
12. Ibid., p. 242.
13. Eddy, *Miscellaneous Writings,* p. 261.
14. Eddy, *Science and Health,* p. 331.
15. Ibid., p. 336.
16. Ibid., pp. 45-46.
17. Ibid., p. 331.
18. Ibid., p. 113.
19. Ibid., p. 332.
20. Eddy, *Miscellaneous Writings,* p. 170.
21. Eddy, *Science and Health,* p. 55.
22. Ibid., p. 475.
23. Ibid., p. 415.
24. Ibid., p. 35.
25. *The Christian Science Journal,* November 1967, p. 606.

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